

GUZ 04

Numbers

*Bible Commentary:
David Guzik TEV - IV*

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David Guzik's Commentary On
04 Exodus
Biblical Text – TEV (Good News Bible)

A Census of Israel's Warriors

Num 1:1 On the first day of the second month in the second year after the people of Israel left Egypt, the LORD spoke to Moses there in the Tent of his presence in the Sinai Desert. He said,

Num 1:2 "You and Aaron are to take a census of the people of Israel by clans and families. List the names of all the men

Num 1:3 twenty years old or older who are fit for military service.

Num 1:4 Ask one clan chief from each tribe to help you."

Num 1:5 (5-16) These are the men, leaders within their tribes, who were chosen from the community for this work:

Tribe	Clan chief
Reuben	Elizur son of Shedeur
Simeon	Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai
Judah	Nahshon son of Amminadab
Issachar	Nethanel son of Zuar
Zebulun	Eliab son of Helon
Ephraim	Elishama son of Ammihud
Manasseh	Gamaliel son of Pedahzur
Benjamin	Abidan son of Gideoni
Dan	Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai
Asher	Pagiel son of Ochran

Gad	Eliasaph son of Deuel
Naphtali	Ahira son of Enan

Num 1:17 With the help of these twelve men Moses and Aaron

Num 1:18 called together the whole community on the first day of the second month and registered all the people by clans and families. The names of all the men twenty years old or older were recorded and counted,

Num 1:19 as the LORD had commanded. In the Sinai Desert, Moses registered the people.

Num 1:20 (20-46) The men twenty years old or older who were fit for military service were registered by name according to clan and family, beginning with the tribe of Reuben, Jacob's oldest son. The totals were as follows:

Tribe	Number
Reuben	46,500
Simeon	59,300
Gad	45,650
Judah	74,600
Issachar	54,400
Zebulun	57,400
Ephraim	40,500
Manasseh	32,200
Benjamin	35,400
Dan	62,700
Asher	41,500
Naphtali	53,400

Total: 603,550.

Levites Exempted

Num 1:47 The Levites were not registered with the other tribes,

Num 1:48 because the LORD had said to Moses,

Num 1:49 "When you take a census of the men fit for military service, do not include the tribe of Levi.

Num 1:50 Instead, put the Levites in charge of the Tent of my presence and all its equipment. They shall carry it and its equipment, serve in it, and set up their camp around it.

Num 1:51 Whenever you move your camp, the Levites shall take the Tent down and set it up again at each new campsite. Anyone else who comes near the Tent shall be put to death.

Num 1:52 The rest of the Israelites shall set up camp, company by company, each man with his own group and under his own banner.

Num 1:53 But the Levites shall camp around the Tent to guard it, so that no one may come near and cause my anger to strike the community of Israel."

Num 1:54 So the people of Israel did everything that the LORD had commanded Moses.

Numbers 1:1-54

Numbers 1 - The Census of Israel

A. Background to the Book of Numbers.

1. As recorded in the Book of Exodus, Israel escaped slavery in Egypt - God miraculously set them free from hundreds of years of bondage. They came through the Red Sea and saw God provide through the desert wilderness. They came to Mount Sinai where God appeared to them in a spectacular way; where Moses went up on the mountain to meet with God and receive the law. At Mount Sinai Israel also embraced an idolatrous image of a golden calf and was corrected by the LORD.

a. Encamped at Mount Sinai, Israel built a tabernacle of meeting and established a priesthood, receiving God's

plan for the priests and the nation at large in Leviticus. At the end of the Book of Leviticus, they have been out of Egypt for a little more than a year.

b. Exodus covered a year; Leviticus only a month - but the Book of Numbers encompasses more than 38 years.

2. *This third book of Moses tells us what happened during those 38 years. The Hebrew title of this book gives us an idea of the theme of Numbers. In Hebrew this book is titled In the Wilderness instead of Numbers.*

a. The wilderness was never meant to be Israel's *destination*. God's intention was to bring them into the Promised Land of Canaan. The wilderness was intended as a temporary place - a place to move through, not to live in.

i. "The Hebrew word for *wilderness* (*midbar*) means a place for driving flocks. It is not a completely arid desert, but contains little vegetation and a few trees. The rainfall in such areas is too light, a few inches per year, to support cultivation." (Wenham)

b. The Book of Numbers is all about God's people *in the wilderness* - how they get there, how God deals with them in the wilderness, and how He brings them out of the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land.

i. "The theme of the book of Numbers is the journey to the Promised Land of Canaan. Its opening ten chapters, covering a mere fifty days, describe how Moses organized Israel for the march from Sinai to the Promised Land." (Wenham)

c. The Book of Numbers gives us a big vision: Where is God taking us? What will it take to get there? What inward qualities must God develop in us and demand in us along the way?

- i. Promised Land people are very different from slave people. Israel emerged from Egypt a slave people, basically *unsuited* for the Promised Land. How would God transform them into a promised-land people?
- ii. "So the Israelites had been slaves in the land of Goshen; their tasks were appointed, and their taskmasters compelled their obedience. Their difficulties had been great, their bondage cruel, but they were free from the necessity of thought and arrangement. Having escaped from their taskmaster, they imagined that freedom meant escape from rule. They had been taught in their year of encampment under the shadow of the mountain that they had to submit to law, and it was irksome to them, and they became discontented. This discontent resulted from lack of perfect confidence in God." (Morgan)

d. The Book of Numbers approaches it all God's way. When we are in the wilderness, we are tempted to launch a hundred different schemes and plans to escape. But only God's way really works; and the Book of Numbers gives us God's way. The idea that *the LORD spoke to Moses* is repeated more than 150 times and more than 20 different ways in Numbers.

B. Israel takes inventory: The census of Numbers 1.

1. (1-3) The purpose of the census.

Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: "Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above; all who are able to go to

war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies."

- a. **Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness:** As Moses met with the LORD in the tabernacle, God commanded him to **take a census of the congregation of the children of Israel** - but only counting **all who are able to go to war in Israel**.
- b. **You and Aaron shall number them by their armies:** This was predominately a military census to see who could fight on Israel's behalf in taking the Promised Land. This was the first step in taking the Promised Land - an *inventory* to see where Israel was and what Israel had to get where God wanted them to be.
 - i. Though the Promised Land has been mentioned during the exodus to this point, the focus has been on getting to Mount Sinai and receiving the law. That was just the beginning; now, the focus turns towards taking the Promised Land and recognizing it will be a *battle*.
 - ii. Imagine how this census would affect the nation! As the count was made, every family would know preparation was being made for war.
- c. **By their armies:** The order to count the potential soldiers was not meant to imply that Israel would take the land because of superior forces or merely the bravery of these men - they would receive the Promised Land by the hand of God. Nevertheless, *they still had to fight* and know what they had available to them going into battle.
 - i. We may fail in spiritual battle because we do not take an honest inventory about where we are spiritually. We may overestimate or underestimate

our spiritual strength and resources. This count of Israel wouldn't let them do that.

d. **By their families, by their fathers' houses:** God wanted the count made **by their families** because the strength of Israel was determined by looking at the strength of individual families.

2. (4-16) *The heads of the tribes.*

And with you there shall be a man from every tribe, each one the head of his father's house. These are the names of the men who shall stand with you: from Reuben, Elizur the son of Shedeur; from Simeon, Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai; from Judah, Nahshon the son of Amminadab; from Issachar, Nethanel the son of Zuar; from Zebulun, Eliab the son of Helon; from the sons of Joseph: from Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud; from Manasseh, Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur; from Benjamin, Abidan the son of Gideoni; from Dan, Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai; from Asher, Pagiil the son of Ocran; from Gad, Eliasaph the son of Deuel; from Naphtali, Ahira the son of Enan." These were chosen from the congregation, leaders of their fathers' tribes, heads of the divisions in Israel.

a. **A man from every tribe, each one the head of his father's house:** Israel was organized according to the tribes that descended from the original twelve sons of Jacob (later renamed *Israel* by God). Each of these twelve tribes designated one who was **the head of his father's house**, who was to **stand with** Moses and stand for their whole tribe.

i. In a sense, this is a representative form of government; each **head of his father's house** was essentially the "governor" of the tribe.

- ii. **These were chosen from the congregation:** It is possible - even likely - that the **head of his father's house** was elected by those in the tribe.
- b. **From Reuben... from Simeon:** Twelve tribes are mentioned, but not the tribe of Levi. Yet the number twelve is maintained because from Jacob's son Joseph, two tribes came (Ephraim and Manasseh).

- i. This was a military census, and the absence of the tribe of Levi among the potential soldiers is important but explained later in the chapter.
- ii. **Nahshon:** This was the head of the house of Judah and is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus (Mat 1:4).

3. (17-19) *The assembly of the leaders.*

Then Moses and Aaron took these men who had been mentioned by name, and they assembled all the congregation together on the first day of the second month; and they recited their ancestry by families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, each one individually. As the LORD commanded Moses, so he numbered them in the Wilderness of Sinai.

- a. **They recited their ancestry by families:** The leaders of each tribe was responsible to count the potential soldiers in their tribe, then they gathered to make report to Moses.
- b. **Each one individually:** Every individual was important to God. This wasn't just the assembling of a final number, but a specific mention of each individual.

C. **The count of the tribes.**

1. (20-21) *The Tribe of Reuben: 46,500 potential soldiers.*

Now the children of Reuben, Israel's oldest son, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war: those who were numbered of the tribe of Reuben were forty-six thousand five hundred.

a. **Those who were numbered of the tribe of Reuben were forty-six thousand five hundred:**

Many people wonder if these numbers are accurate and literal. Some think that they are grossly exaggerated, and others have suggested they are increased by a factor of ten. Despite the objections of critics, it is best to trust the simple testimony of God's Word. Surely God could provide for such a multitude in the wilderness and occasional discrepancies in numbers are likely due to scribal errors.

b. **Forty-six thousand five hundred:** Are these numbers exact? Most likely, they are rounded off to the nearest one hundred (except in the case of the Tribe of Gad).

2. (22-23) *The Tribe of Simeon: 59,300 potential soldiers.*

From the children of Simeon, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, of those who were numbered, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war: those who were numbered of the tribe of Simeon were fifty-nine thousand three hundred.

3. (24-25) *The Tribe of Gad: 45,650 potential soldiers.*

From the children of Gad, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above,

all who were able to go to war: those who were numbered of the tribe of Gad were forty-five thousand six hundred and fifty.

4. (26-27) *The Tribe of Judah: 74,600 potential soldiers.*

From the children of Judah, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war: those who were numbered of the tribe of Judah were seventy-four thousand six hundred.

5. (28-29) *The Tribe of Issachar: 54,400 potential soldiers.*

From the children of Issachar, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war: those who were numbered of the tribe of Issachar were fifty-four thousand four hundred.

6. (30-31) *The Tribe of Zebulun: 57,400 potential soldiers.*

From the children of Zebulun, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war: those who were numbered of the tribe of Zebulun were fifty-seven thousand four hundred.

7. (32-33) *The Tribe of Ephraim: 40,500 potential soldiers.*

From the sons of Joseph, the children of Ephraim, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war: those who were numbered of the tribe of Ephraim were forty thousand five hundred.

8. (34-35) *The Tribe of Manasseh: 32,200 potential soldiers.*

From the children of Manasseh, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war: those who were numbered of the tribe of Manasseh were thirty-two thousand two hundred.

9. (36-37) *The Tribe of Benjamin: 35,400 potential soldiers.*

From the children of Benjamin, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war: those who were numbered of the tribe of Benjamin were thirty-five thousand four hundred.

10. (38-39) *The Tribe of Dan: 62,700 potential soldiers.*

From the children of Dan, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war: those who were numbered of the tribe of Dan were sixty-two thousand seven hundred.

11. (40-41) *The Tribe of Asher: 41,500 potential soldiers.*

From the children of Asher, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war: those who were numbered of the tribe of Asher were forty-one thousand five hundred.

12. (42-43) *The Tribe of Naphtali: 53,400 potential soldiers.*

From the children of Naphtali, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war: those who

were numbered of the tribe of Naphtali were fifty-three thousand four hundred.

13. (44-46) *Summary of the tribes: 603,550 potential soldiers in Israel.*

These are the ones who were numbered, whom Moses and Aaron numbered, with the leaders of Israel, twelve men, each one representing his father's house. So all who were numbered of the children of Israel, by their fathers' houses, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war in Israel; all who were numbered were six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty.

- a. **All who were able to go to war in Israel; all who were numbered were six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty:** At the end of the Book of Numbers - 38 years later - this census is repeated. The total number of available soldiers will be almost the same - only a loss of some two thousand. But the numbers of each tribe change significantly, and there is meaning in what happened to each tribe over these critical 38 years.
- b. **So all who were numbered of the children of Israel, by their fathers' houses:** In this first census Manasseh is the smallest tribe and Judah is the largest. There are two tribes in the 30 thousands; three in the 40 thousands; four in the 50 thousands; one in the 60 thousands, and one in the 70 thousands.
- c. **All who were numbered were six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty:** Based on having 603,550 available soldiers, many people estimate the total population of Israel at this time to be between two and two-and-a-half million.

14. (47-54) *The special case of the tribe of Levi.*

But the Levites were not numbered among them by their fathers' tribe; for the LORD had spoken to Moses, saying: "Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor take a census of them among the children of Israel; but you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its furnishings, and over all things that belong to it; they shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they shall attend to it and camp around the tabernacle. And when the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up. The outsider who comes near shall be put to death. The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp, everyone by his own standard, according to their armies; but the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony." Thus the children of Israel did; according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so they did.

a. But the Levites were not numbered among them:

Because this was a census of potential soldiers, the Tribe of Levi was not counted. They alone among the tribes did not go to war because they had special responsibility to God for the priestly duties of Israel.

b. Thus the children of Israel did; according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so they did:

Counting, or taking inventory, is an essential step in organization and moving forward. In preparing to enter the Promised Land Israel had to be *organized* - God is an organized God and moves through organization even when we can't figure it out! Therefore, it was essential that Israel took inventory and saw where they were.

i. God counts things. He counts the stars and has a name for each one (Psa 147:4; Isa 40:26). God even counts and knows the number of hairs on your head! (Mat 10:30)

ii. "He who counts the stars and calls them all by their names, leaves nothing unarranged in his own service." (Spurgeon)

c. **Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number:** We also must see, that as in the case of Levi, there are some things that can't - or shouldn't - be counted. Israel had to appreciate that some of the most important things can't be counted.

i. Taking inventory is fine; even a necessary first step in organizing for victory in taking hold of God's promises. But it must always be done understanding that some of the important factors - as the Levites were in Israel - cannot be counted. No inventory is totally complete, and God always works mightily through things that can't be counted.

Arrangement of the Camp

Num 2:1 The LORD gave Moses and Aaron the following instructions.

Num 2:2 When the Israelites set up camp, each man will camp under the banner of his division and the flag of his own clan. The camp is to be set up all around the Tent.

Num 2:3 (3-9) On the east side, those under the banner of the division of Judah shall camp in their groups, under their leaders, as follows:

Tribe	Leader	Number
Judah	Nahshon son of Amminadab	74,600
Issachar	Nethanel son of Zuar	54,400
Zebulun	Eliab son of Helon	57,400

Total: 186,400. The division of Judah shall march first.

Num 2:10 (10-16) On the south, those under the banner of the division of Reuben shall camp in their groups, under their leaders, as follows:

Tribe	Leader	Number
Reuben	Elizur son of Shedeur	46,500
Simeon	Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai	59,300
Gad	Eliasaph son of Deuel	45,650

Total: 151,450. The division of Reuben shall march second.

Num 2:17 Then, between the first two divisions and the last two the Levites are to march carrying the Tent. Each division shall march in the same order as they camp, each in position under its banner.

Num 2:18 (18-24) On the west, those under the banner of the division of Ephraim shall camp in their groups, under their leaders, as follows:

Tribe	Leader	Number
Ephraim	Elishama son of Ammihud	40,500
Manasseh	Gamaliel son of Pedahzur	32,200
Benjamin	Abidan son of Gideoni	35,400

Total: 108,100. The division of Ephraim shall march third.

Num 2:25 (25-31) On the north, those under the banner of the division of Dan shall camp in their groups, under their leaders, as follows:

Tribe	Leader	Number
Dan	Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai	62,700
Asher	Pagiel son of Ochran	41,500
Naphtali	Ahira son of En	53,400

Total: 157,600. The division of Dan shall march last.

Num 2:32 The total number of the people of Israel enrolled in the divisions, group by group, was 603,550.

Num 2:33 As the LORD had commanded Moses, the Levites were not registered with the rest of the Israelites.

Num 2:34 So the people of Israel did everything the LORD had commanded Moses. They camped, each under his own banner, and they marched, each with his own clan.

Numbers 2:1-34

Numbers 2 - The Camp of Israel

A. The tribes of Israel arranged around the tabernacle.

1. (1-2) The command to arrange around the tabernacle.

And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: "Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard, beside the emblems of his father's house; they shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting."

a. **Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard:** Israel had been on this Exodus journey for more than a year and had assembled just about any way they had pleased. But now, ready to enter into the Promised Land, they had to take the next step in organization: Ordering themselves.

b. **They shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting:** At the center of this order was the tabernacle itself. The tribes would arrange themselves to the east, south, west, and north in relation to the tabernacle. Since the tabernacle was symbolically the presence of God with them, this meant all order in Israel began being centered around God Himself.

2. (3-9) The tribes camped to the east of the tabernacle.

"On the east side, toward the rising of the sun, those of the standard of the forces with Judah shall camp according to their armies; and Nahshon the son of Amminadab *shall be* the leader of the children of Judah." And his army was numbered at seventy-four thousand six hundred. **"Those who camp next to him *shall be* the tribe of Issachar, and Nethanel the son of Zuar *shall be* the leader of the children of Issachar."** And his army was numbered at fifty-four thousand four hundred. Then *comes* the tribe of Zebulun, and Eliab the son of Helon *shall be* the leader of the children of Zebulun." And his army was numbered at fifty-seven thousand four hundred. All who were numbered according to their armies of the forces with Judah, one hundred and eighty-six thousand four hundred; these shall break camp first."

- a. **On the east side, toward the rising of the sun, those of the standard of the forces with Judah shall camp according to their armies:** Judah was first, and closest to the tabernacle itself. The tribes of Issachar and Zebulun followed in order after Judah. These tribes would order themselves after **the standard** (the banner or flag) of Judah, which was said to be a *lion*.
- b. **And Nahshon the son of Amminadab shall be the leader of the children of Judah:** God recognized a specifically called leader for the tribe of Judah (and for the other tribes following). The order and organization God called Israel to required *leadership*, with leaders both recognized by God and respected by the people.
- c. **One hundred and eighty-six thousand four hundred:** The total number of available soldiers among the eastward tribes was 186,400.
- d. **These shall break camp first:** There was an order to the encampment and the marching for the tribes.

They were to move as an orderly army, not as a mob.

3. (10-16) *The tribes camped to the south of the tabernacle.*

"On the south side shall be the standard of the forces with Reuben according to their armies, and the leader of the children of Reuben shall be Elizur the son of Shedeur." And his army was numbered at forty-six thousand five hundred. "Those who camp next to him shall be the tribe of Simeon, and the leader of the children of Simeon shall be Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai." And his army was numbered at fifty-nine thousand three hundred. "Then comes the tribe of Gad, and the leader of the children of Gad shall be Eliasaph the son of Reuel." And his army was numbered at forty-five thousand six hundred and fifty. "All who were numbered according to their armies of the forces with Reuben, one hundred and fifty-one thousand four hundred and fifty; they shall be the second to break camp."

a. **On the south side shall be the standard of the forces with Reuben according to their armies:** On the **south side** of the tabernacle Reuben was the first tribe and set closest to the tabernacle itself. Then the tribes of Simeon and Gad followed in order. The tribes ordered themselves after **the standard** of Reuben, which was said to be a *man*.

b. **One hundred and fifty-one thousand four hundred and fifty:** The total number of available soldiers among the southward tribes was 151,450.

4. (17) *The tribe in the middle, with the tabernacle: Levi.*

And the tabernacle of meeting shall move out with the camp of the Levites in the middle of the camps; as

they camp, so they shall move out, everyone in his place, by their standards.

a. **With the camp of the Levites in the middle of the camps:** The priestly tribe was **in the middle of the camps**, closest to the tabernacle and surrounded by the other tribes.

b. **So they shall move out, everyone in his place, by their standards:** Apparently, this was not only the way Israel was to make their camp, but also, the way they were to order their march. The taking of Canaan would not be accomplished by a mob, but by an organized and orderly group.

5. (18-24) *The tribes camped to the west of the tabernacle.*

"On the west side shall be the standard of the forces with Ephraim according to their armies, and the leader of the children of Ephraim shall be Elishama the son of Ammihud." And his army was numbered at forty thousand five hundred. **"Next to him comes the tribe of Manasseh, and the leader of the children of Manasseh shall be Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur."** And his army was numbered at thirty-two thousand two hundred. **"Then comes the tribe of Benjamin, and the leader of the children of Benjamin shall be Abidan the son of Gideoni."** And his army was numbered at thirty-five thousand four hundred. **"All who were numbered according to their armies of the forces with Ephraim, one hundred and eight thousand one hundred; they shall be the third to break camp."**

a. **On the west side shall be the standard of the forces with Ephraim according to their armies:** Ephraim was first, and closest to the tabernacle itself on the **west side**. Following the tribe of Ephraim were the tribes of Manasseh and Benjamin. The tribes ordered

themselves after **the standard** of Ephraim, which was said to be a *calf*.

b. **One hundred and eight thousand one hundred; they shall be the third to break camp:** The total number of available soldiers among the westward tribes was 108,100.

6. (25-31) *The tribes camped to the north of the tabernacle.*

"The standard of the forces with Dan shall be on the north side according to their armies, and the leader of the children of Dan shall be Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai." And his army was numbered at sixty-two thousand seven hundred. "Those who camp next to him shall be the tribe of Asher, and the leader of the children of Asher shall be Pagiel the son of Ocran." And his army was numbered at forty-one thousand five hundred. "Then comes the tribe of Naphtali, and the leader of the children of Naphtali shall be Ahira the son of Enan." And his army was numbered at fifty-three thousand four hundred. "All who were numbered of the forces with Dan, one hundred and fifty-seven thousand six hundred; they shall break camp last, with their standards."

a. **The standard of the forces with Dan shall be on the north side according to their armies:** Dan was first, and closest to the tabernacle itself on the north side. Following the tribe of Dan were the tribes of Asher and Naphtali. The tribes ordered themselves after **the standard** of Dan, which was said to be an *eagle*.

b. **All who were numbered of the forces with Dan, one hundred and fifty-seven thousand six hundred:** The total number of available soldiers among the northward tribes was 157,600.

7. (32-34) Summary: Israel's order around the tabernacle.

These are the ones who were numbered of the children of Israel by their fathers' houses. All who were numbered according to their armies of the forces were six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty. But the Levites were not numbered among the children of Israel, just as the LORD commanded Moses. Thus the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses; so they camped by their standards and so they broke camp, each one by his family, according to their fathers' houses.

- a. **These are the ones who were numbered of the children of Israel by their fathers' houses:** The total of 603,550 available soldiers is ordered around the tabernacle; the number excluding the tribe of Levi.
- b. **So they camped by their standards:** Each tribal group was arranged after the **standards** of the tribes, and they **broke camp** and marched in that same order.

B. Observations.

1. *God is a God of order; here, before Israel can take the Promised Land, He requires they order themselves also. Not only is it more efficient and useful, but it is also simply more like God - ordered and organized.*

- a. There is a limit to what we can be and what we can do for the LORD without order and organization. It isn't that order and organization are requirements for progress in the Christian life; they *are* progress in the Christian life, becoming more like the LORD.
- b. *Nothing* is accomplished in God's kingdom without order and organization. While it may *seem* so to us, it is only an illusion - behind the scenes, God is moving with utmost order and organization, though we cannot see it.

2. God orders things according to His wisdom, not ours. In the arrangement of the tribes, He did not place the largest tribes closest to the tabernacle (as if bigger was always better); Ephraim, the closest westward tribe, is the third smallest tribe. Nor did He place all the large tribes on the outward perimeter for greatest protection (Benjamin, the second smallest tribe, is on the outer perimeter). God always has order and organization, but it may not make sense to us.

a. Our resistance to God's order and organization is almost always the product of simple selfishness - wanting to do things our own way, instead of the LORD's. For slaves, it is simple - slaves are always told what to do and don't need to be ordered and organized. But free men must be taught order and organization and must submit to it.

3. Everything was positioned in relation to the presence of God, the tabernacle. God could have described where the tribe of Judah was in relation to the tribe of Dan, but He did not. The reference point was always God Himself.

a. It is hard to underestimate the trouble people get into in their walk with God because they position and measure themselves in reference to other people. God is to be our focus, not other people.

4. The tribes of Israel camped around four banners, which were said to be a lion, a man, a calf, and an eagle. We find the same four creatures surrounding the throne of God in Revelation.

a. *The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. (Rev 4:7)*

- i. "According to rabbinical tradition, the standard of Judah bore the figure of a lion, that of Reuben the likeness of a man or of a man's head, that of Ephraim the figure of an ox, and that of Dan the figure of an eagle." (Keil-Delitzsch)
- b. God's order is never arbitrary, or just made up on a whim. It is after His heavenly pattern. We must always accept God's order and organization, even when we don't understand it.

The Sons of Aaron

Num 3:1 This is the family of Aaron and Moses at the time the LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Num 3:2 Aaron had four sons: Nadab, the oldest, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

Num 3:3 They were anointed and ordained as priests,

Num 3:4 but Nadab and Abihu were killed when they offered unholy fire to the LORD in the Sinai Desert. They had no children, so Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests during Aaron's lifetime.

Duties of the Levites

Num 3:5 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 3:6 "Bring forward the tribe of Levi and appoint them as servants of Aaron the priest.

Num 3:7 They shall do the work required for the Tent of my presence and perform duties for the priests and for the whole community.

Num 3:8 They shall take charge of all the equipment of the Tent and perform the duties for the rest of the Israelites.

Num 3:9 The only responsibility the Levites have is to serve Aaron and his sons.

Num 3:10 You shall appoint Aaron and his sons to carry out the duties of the priesthood; anyone else who tries to do so

shall be put to death."

Num 3:11 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 3:12 (12-13) "The Levites are now to be mine. When I killed all the first-born of the Egyptians, I consecrated as my own the oldest son of each Israelite family and the first-born of every animal. Now, instead of having the first-born sons of Israel as my own, I have the Levites; they will belong to me. I am the LORD."

Num 3:14 In the Sinai Desert the LORD commanded Moses

Num 3:15 to register the Levites by clans and families, enrolling every male a month old or older,

Num 3:16 and Moses did so.

Num 3:17 (17-20) Levi had three sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, who were the ancestors of the clans that bear their names. Gershon had two sons: Libni and Shimei; Kohath had four sons: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel; and Merari had two sons: Mahli and Mushi. They were the ancestors of the families that bear their names.

Num 3:21 The clan of Gershon was composed of the families of Libni and Shimei.

Num 3:22 The total number of males one month old or older that were enrolled was 7,500.

Num 3:23 This clan was to camp on the west behind the Tent,

Num 3:24 with Eliasaph son of Lael as chief of the clan.

Num 3:25 They were responsible for the Tent, its inner cover, its outer cover, the curtain for the entrance,

Num 3:26 the curtains for the court which is around the Tent and the altar, and the curtain for the entrance of the court. They were responsible for all the service connected with these items.

Num 3:27 The clan of Kohath was composed of the families of Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

Num 3:28 The total number of males one month old or older that were enrolled was 8,600.

Num 3:29 This clan was to camp on the south side of the Tent,

Num 3:30 with Elizaphan son of Uzziel as chief of the clan.

Num 3:31 They were responsible for the Covenant Box, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the utensils the priests use in the Holy Place, and the curtain at the entrance to the Most Holy Place. They were responsible for all the service connected with these items.

Num 3:32 The chief of the Levites was Eleazar son of Aaron the priest. He was in charge of those who carried out the duties in the Holy Place.

Num 3:33 The clan of Merari was composed of the families of Mahli and Mushi.

Num 3:34 The total number of males one month old or older that were enrolled was 6,200.

Num 3:35 This clan was to camp on the north side of the Tent, with Zuriel son of Abihail as chief of the clan.

Num 3:36 They were assigned responsibility for the frames for the Tent, its bars, posts, bases, and all its fittings. They were responsible for all the service connected with these items.

Num 3:37 They were also responsible for the posts, bases, pegs, and ropes for the outer court.

Num 3:38 Moses and Aaron and his sons were to camp in front of the Tent on the east. They were responsible for carrying out the services performed in the Holy Place for the people of Israel. Anyone else who tried to do so was to be put to death.

Num 3:39 The total number of all the Levite males one month old or older that Moses enrolled by clans at the

command of the LORD, was 22,000.

Redemption of the Firstborn

Num 3:40 (40-41) The LORD said to Moses, "All of Israel's first-born sons belong to me. So register by name every first-born male Israelite, one month old or older. But in place of them I claim all the Levites as mine! I am the LORD! I also claim the livestock of the Levites in place of all the first-born of the livestock."

Num 3:42 Moses obeyed, and registered all the first-born males

Num 3:43 one month old or older; the total was 22,273.

Num 3:44 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 3:45 "Now dedicate the Levites as mine in place of all the first-born Israelite sons, and dedicate the livestock of the Levites in place of the first-born of the Israelites' livestock.

Num 3:46 Since the first-born Israelite sons outnumber the Levites by 273, you must buy back the extra sons.

Num 3:47 For each one pay five pieces of silver, according to the official standard,

Num 3:48 and give this money to Aaron and his sons."

Num 3:49 Moses obeyed and took

Num 3:50 the 1,365 pieces of silver

Num 3:51 and gave them to Aaron and his sons.

Numbers 3:1-51

Numbers 3 - The Census of the Levites

A. Priests and Levites.

1. (1-5) The priests: The family of Aaron.

Now these are the records of Aaron and Moses when the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. And these are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab, the

firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he consecrated to minister as priests. Nadab and Abihu had died before the LORD when they offered profane fire before the LORD in the Wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar ministered as priests in the presence of Aaron their father. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

- a. **Nadab, the firstborn, and Abihu:** Nadab and Abihu were the two oldest children of Aaron, and the two ranking priests behind him - yet they were struck down by the LORD for offering *profane fire* before the LORD (Lev 10:1-7).
- b. **Eleazar, and Ithamar:** Therefore, Eleazar and Ithamar inherited the priesthood, and passed it down to their sons after them.
- c. **The sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he consecrated to minister as priests:** It is important to realize that the priests were only one small family among the Levites; to be a priest and a Levite were not the same thing at all. Only those who were descendants of Aaron could be priests.

2. (6-10) *The Levites: Their role in relation to Aaron.*

"Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. And they shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of meeting, to do the work of the tabernacle. Also they shall attend to all the furnishings of the tabernacle of meeting, and to the needs of the children of Israel, to do the work of the tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are given entirely to him from among the children of Israel. So you shall

appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall attend to their priesthood; but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death."

a. **Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him:**

The entire tribe of Levi was given to serve the needs of Aaron and the priests (**they shall attend to his needs**), the needs of the congregation at large (**and the needs of the whole congregation**), and the needs of the tabernacle itself (**attend to all the furnishings of the tabernacle... to do the work of the tabernacle**).

b. **And they shall attend to his needs:** Again, God has an order and organization. The Levites were under the direction of Aaron (**that they may serve him... they are given entirely to him**). They weren't to "do their own thing," but Aaron's thing.

i. "Nothing in the holy things of God was left to chance or improvisation. None of the sacred persons who ministered in his presence was to be unprepared or untaught." (Allen)

c. **To do the work of the tabernacle:** In some ways, being a priest was far more visible and perhaps "glamorous" than being a Levite. But the service of the Levites made the work of the priests possible and was seen by God as having equal value.

i. **The outsider who comes near shall be put to death:** If a Levite grew jealous, and decided they wanted to do the work of a priest, it was strictly forbidden - it was an affront to God's order and organization.

3. (11-13) *The Levites are a special possession to God.*

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the

children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I am the LORD.”

a. **I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn:** The firstborn belonged to God; a firstborn lamb from a ewe would be given to the LORD. God didn't want human sacrifice, so He took the tribe of Levi as Israel's **firstborn.**

B. The census of the tribe of Levi.

1. *(14-20) The command to number the tribe of Levi.*

Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, saying: “Number the children of Levi by their fathers' houses, by their families; you shall number every male from a month old and above.” So Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded. These were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. And these are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families: Libni and Shimei. And the sons of Kohath by their families: Amram, Izehar, Hebron, and Uzziel. And the sons of Merari by their families: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites by their fathers' houses.

a. **Number the children of Levi:** Though they were not counted among the available soldiers, the Levites were still to be counted, and counted by the males **from a month old and above.**

b. **By their fathers' houses:** They were to be categorized by the families, with the main grouping according to Levi's three sons: **Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.**

2. (21-26) *The census and duties of the family of Gershon.*

From Gershon came the family of the Libnites and the family of the Shimites; these were the families of the Gershonites. Those who were numbered, according to the number of all the males from a month old and above; of those who were numbered there were seven thousand five hundred. The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward. And the leader of the fathers' house of the Gershonites was Eliasaph the son of Lael. The duties of the children of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting included the tabernacle, the tent with its covering, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting, the screen for the door of the court, the hangings of the court which are around the tabernacle and the altar, and their cords, according to all the work relating to them.

a. **The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward:** The Gershonites (7,500 males) were to camp westward to the tabernacle (in between Judah and the tabernacle itself).

b. **The duties of the children of Gershon:** The Gershonites were to take care of the skins that covered the tabernacle itself.

3. (27-32) *The census and duties of the family of Kohath.*

From Kohath came the family of the Amramites, the family of the Izharites, the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites; these were the families of the Kohathites. According to the number of

all the males, from a month old and above, there were eight thousand six hundred keeping charge of the sanctuary. The families of the children of Kohath were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle. And the leader of the fathers' house of the families of the Kohathites was Elizaphan the son of Uzziel. Their duty included the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the utensils of the sanctuary with which they ministered, the screen, and all the work relating to them. And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest was to be chief over the leaders of the Levites, with oversight of those who kept charge of the sanctuary.

- a. **These were the families of the Kohathites:** The Kohathites (8,600 males) were to camp southward to the tabernacle (in between Reuben and the tabernacle itself).
- b. **Their duty included the ark:** The Kohathites were to take care of the furniture of the tabernacle: The ark of the covenant, the table of showbread, and so forth, under the direction of Eleazar the priest, son of Aaron.

4. (33-37) *The census and duties of the family of Merari.*

From Merari came the family of the Mahlites and the family of the Mushites; these were the families of Merari. And those who were numbered, according to the number of all the males from a month old and above, were six thousand two hundred. The leader of the fathers' house of the families of Merari was Zuriel the son of Abihail. These were to camp on the north side of the tabernacle. And the appointed duty of the children of Merari included the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, its utensils, all the work relating to them, and the pillars of the court all around, with their sockets, their pegs, and their cords.

a. **These were the families of Merari:** The family of Merari (6,200 males) were to camp northward to the tabernacle (in between Dan and the tabernacle itself).

b. **The appointed duty of the children of Merari included the boards of the tabernacle:** The family of Merari was to take care of the structural aspects of the tabernacle: The pillars, the boards, and so forth.

5. (38-39) *The camp of the priests.*

Moreover those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east, before the tabernacle of meeting, were Moses, Aaron, and his sons, keeping charge of the sanctuary, to meet the needs of the children of Israel; but the outsider who came near was to be put to death. All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the LORD, by their families, all the males from a month old and above, were twenty-two thousand.

a. **Those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east:** The family of Aaron, and Moses, were to camp on the east side of the tabernacle - closest to the entrance, which was on the east.

b. **Moses, Aaron, and his sons, keeping charge of the sanctuary:** God's order and organization extends to certain jobs for certain people to do. The families of the Levites had certain callings they were to fulfill. There was no one man or family to do everything; God made them dependent on one another to accomplish the work.

c. **Were twenty-two thousand:** "The total of 22,000 Levites given in verse 39 does not tally with the totals of the individual clans given in verses 22, 28, 34 which come to 22,300. The discrepancy is most easily explained

as textual corruption in verse 28. The number of Kohathites may originally have been 8,300. 3 (Hebrew *s/s*) could quite easily have been corrupted into 6 (*ss*).” (Wenham)

6. (40-51) *The exchange of the firstborn.*

Then the LORD said to Moses: “Number all the firstborn males of the children of Israel from a month old and above, and take the number of their names. And you shall take the Levites for Me; I am the LORD; instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the livestock of the children of Israel.” So Moses numbered all the firstborn among the children of Israel, as the LORD commanded him. And all the firstborn males, according to the number of names from a month old and above, of those who were numbered of them, were twenty-two thousand two hundred and seventy-three. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of their livestock. The Levites shall be Mine: I am the LORD. And for the redemption of the two hundred and seventy-three of the firstborn of the children of Israel, who are more than the number of the Levites, you shall take five shekels for each one individually; you shall take *them* in the currency of the shekel of the sanctuary, the shekel of twenty gerahs. And you shall give the money, with which the excess number of them is redeemed, to Aaron and his sons.” So Moses took the redemption money from those who were over and above those who were redeemed by the Levites. From the firstborn of the children of Israel he took the money, one thousand three hundred and sixty-five

shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. And Moses gave their redemption money to Aaron and his sons, according to the word of the LORD, as the LORD commanded Moses.

- a. **Number all the firstborn males of the children of Israel:** The firstborn - which was always thought to be the best and the favored - always belongs to God; so instead of giving the firstborn of Israel to God in sacrifice, the tribe of Levi was "given" to God as in place of each of the firstborn sons of Israel.
- b. **All the firstborn males, according to the number of names:** However, there were 22,273 firstborn sons in Israel; and there were only 22,000 Levite males (Num 3:39). The extra 273 were given a monetary value (**five shekels for each one individually**), and the money was given to the tabernacle as redemption money.
 - i. The number of firstborn sons is low if accounted for all the nation; it would mean that only one in 27 sons were firstborns - an unlikely percentage. It is more probable that the 22,273 firstborn sons were those born in the thirteen months of the Exodus.

Duties of the Kohathites

Num 4:1 The LORD told Moses

Num 4:2 to take a census of the Levite clan of Kohath by subclans and families,

Num 4:3 and to register all the men between the ages of thirty and fifty who were qualified to work in the Tent of the LORD's presence.

Num 4:4 Their service involves the most holy things.

Num 4:5 The LORD gave Moses the following instructions. When it is time to break camp, Aaron and his sons shall

enter the Tent, take down the curtain in front of the Covenant Box, and cover the Box with it.

Num 4:6 They shall put a fine leather cover over it, spread a cloth of solid blue on top, and then insert the carrying poles.

Num 4:7 They shall spread a blue cloth over the table for the bread offered to the LORD and put on it the dishes, the incense bowls, the offering bowls, and the jars for the wine offering. There shall always be bread on the table.

Num 4:8 They shall spread a red cloth over all of this, put a fine leather cover over it, and then insert the carrying poles.

Num 4:9 They shall take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand, with its lamps, tongs, trays, and all the olive oil containers.

Num 4:10 They shall wrap it and all its equipment in a fine leather cover and place it on a carrying frame.

Num 4:11 Next they shall spread a blue cloth over the gold altar, put a fine leather cover over it, and then insert the carrying poles.

Num 4:12 They shall take all the utensils used in the Holy Place, wrap them in a blue cloth, put a fine leather cover over them, and place them on a carrying frame.

Num 4:13 They shall remove the greasy ashes from the altar and spread a purple cloth over it.

Num 4:14 They shall put on it all the equipment used in the service at the altar: fire pans, hooks, shovels, and basins. Then they shall put a fine leather cover over it and insert the carrying poles.

Num 4:15 When it is time to break camp, the clan of Kohath shall come to carry the sacred objects only after Aaron and his sons have finished covering them and all their equipment. The Kohath clan must not touch the sacred

objects, or they will die. These are the responsibilities of the Kohath clan whenever the Tent is moved.

Num 4:16 Eleazar son of Aaron the priest shall be responsible for the whole Tent and for the oil for the lamps, the incense, the grain offerings, the anointing oil, and everything else in the Tent that has been consecrated to the LORD.

Num 4:17 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron,

Num 4:18 "Do not let the clan of Kohath

Num 4:19 be killed by coming near these most sacred objects. To prevent this from happening, Aaron and his sons shall go in and assign each man his task and tell him what to carry.

Num 4:20 But if the Kohathites enter the Tent and see the priests preparing the sacred objects for moving, they will die."

Num 4:21 The LORD told Moses

Num 4:22 to take a census of the Levite clan of Gershon by subclans and families,

Num 4:23 and to register all the men between the ages of thirty and fifty who were qualified to work in the Tent of the LORD's presence.

Num 4:24 They shall be responsible for carrying the following objects:

Num 4:25 the Tent, its inner cover, its outer cover, the fine leather cover on top of it, the curtain for the entrance,

Num 4:26 the curtains and ropes for the court that is around the Tent and the altar, the curtains for the entrance of the court, and all the fittings used in setting up these objects. They shall perform all the tasks required for these things.

Num 4:27 Moses and Aaron shall see to it that the Gershonites perform all the duties and carry everything that Aaron and his sons assign to them.

Num 4:28 These are the responsibilities of the Gershon clan in the Tent; they shall carry them out under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron the priest.

Num 4:29 The LORD told Moses to take a census of the Levite clan of Merari by subclans and families,

Num 4:30 and to register all the men between the ages of thirty and fifty who were qualified to work in the Tent of the LORD's presence.

Num 4:31 They shall be responsible for carrying the frames, bars, posts, and bases of the Tent,

Num 4:32 and the posts, bases, pegs, and ropes of the court around the Tent, with all the fittings used in setting them up. Each man will be responsible for carrying specific items.

Num 4:33 These are the responsibilities of the Merari clan in their service in the Tent; they shall carry them out under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron the priest.

Num 4:34 (34-48) Following the LORD's command, Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of the community took a census of the three Levite clans, Kohath, Gershon, and Merari. They did this by subclans and families and registered all the men between the ages of thirty and fifty who were qualified to work in the Tent of the LORD's presence, as follows:

Clan	Number
Kohath	2,750
Gershon	2,630
Merari	3,200

Total: 8,580.

Num 4:49 Each man was registered as the LORD had commanded Moses; and at the command of the LORD given through Moses, each man was assigned responsibility for his task of serving or carrying.

Numbers 4:1-49

Numbers 4 - Duties of the Priests

A. The duty of the Kohathites.

1. (1-3) Those fit for service.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: "Take a census of the sons of Kohath from among the children of Levi, by their families, by their fathers' house, from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting."

a. **Take a census of the sons of Kohath:** Among the males of the family of Kohath, only those between thirty and fifty were allowed to actually do the work of the sanctuary. In some ways, this was thought to be the "prime" of a man's life (combining both wisdom and physical strength) and God wanted the best from the family of Kohath.

2. (4-14) The packing of the furniture and utensils of the tabernacle.

"This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of meeting, relating to the most holy things: When the camp prepares to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come, and they shall take down the covering veil and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. Then they shall put on it a covering of badger skins, and spread over that a cloth entirely of blue; and they shall insert its poles. On the table of showbread they shall spread a blue cloth, and put on it the dishes, the pans, the bowls, and the pitchers for pouring; and the showbread shall be on it. They shall spread over them a scarlet cloth, and cover the same with a covering of badger skins; and they shall insert its poles. And they shall take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand of the light, with its lamps, its wick-

trimmers, its trays, and all its oil vessels, with which they service it. Then they shall put it with all its utensils in a covering of badger skins, and put *it* on a carrying beam. Over the golden altar they shall spread a blue cloth, and cover it with a covering of badger skins; and they shall insert its poles. Then they shall take all the utensils of service with which they minister in the sanctuary, put *them* in a blue cloth, cover them with a covering of badger skins, and put *them* on a carrying beam. Also they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth over it. They shall put on it all its implements with which they minister there; the firepans, the forks, the shovels, the basins, and all the utensils of the altar; and they shall spread on it a covering of badger skins, and insert its poles.”

a. **When the camp prepares to journey:** On the way to the Promised Land, the tabernacle furniture would have to travel and be carried great distances. But first, it must be packed properly to ensure its safe travel. Since the furniture itself was holy, it had to be covered and packed by Aaron and the priests before the sons of Kohath could get to it.

3. (15-20) *The moving of the furniture and utensils of the tabernacle.*

“And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry *them*; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These are the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry. The appointed duty of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest *is* the oil for the light, the sweet incense, the daily grain offering, the anointing oil, the

oversight of all the tabernacle, of all that *is* in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings.” Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: “Do not cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites; but do this in regard to them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint each of them to his service and his task. But they shall not go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, lest they die.”

- a. **When the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die:** The Kohathites were forbidden to touch any of the tabernacle furniture; it was made with poles that one could use to carry the furniture without touching the item itself.
- b. **The appointed duty of Eleazar:** Eleazar, the eldest surviving son of Aaron the high priest, supervised the work of the Kohathites.

B. The duty of the Gershonites.

1. (21-23) *Those fit for service.*

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “Also take a census of the sons of Gershon, by their fathers’ house, by their families. From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, all who enter to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting.”

2. (24-28) *The duties of the Gershonites.*

“This *is* the service of the families of the Gershonites, in serving and carrying: They shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle and the tabernacle of meeting *with* its covering, the covering of badger skins that *is* on it, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting,

the screen for the door of the gate of the court, the hangings of the court which are around the tabernacle and altar, and their cords, all the furnishings for their service and all that is made for these things: so shall they serve. Aaron and his sons shall assign all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, all their tasks and all their service. And you shall appoint to them all their tasks as their duty. This is the service of the families of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting. And their duties shall be under the authority of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.”

- a. **This is the service of the families of the Gershonites:** They had oversight of the coverings of the tabernacle; the skins and artistically woven designs that made up the walls and the roof of the tent; they did this under the supervision of Aaron’s son Ithamar.

C. The duty of the family of Merari.

1. (29-30) *Those fit for service.*

“As for the sons of Merari, you shall number them by their families and by their fathers’ house. From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, everyone who enters the service to do the work of the tabernacle of meeting.”

2. (31-33) *The duties of the family of Merari.*

“And this is what they must carry as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting: the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, and the pillars around the court with their sockets, pegs, and cords, with all their furnishings and all their service; and you shall assign to each man by name the items he must carry. This is the service of the families of the sons of Merari, as all their service for the

tabernacle of meeting, under the authority of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest."

- a. **This is what they must carry as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting:** They had the job of packing and transporting the boards and pillars of the tabernacle; this was important work, because of all the precious metals used, the weight of the tabernacle was some 19,000 pounds.
- b. **You shall assign to each man by name the items he must carry:** This wasn't "volunteer" work. Moses and Aaron *assigned***to each man by name the items he must carry.** With such valuable cargo, and such a long distance, it was an important job to do.

D. Summary of the census of the Levites.

1. (34-48) *The final count according to the families.*

And Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites by their families and by their fathers' house, from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tabernacle of meeting; and those who were numbered by their families were two thousand seven hundred and fifty. These were the ones who were numbered of the families of the Kohathites, all who might serve in the tabernacle of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses. And those who were numbered of the sons of Gershon, by their families and by their fathers' house, from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tabernacle of meeting; those who were numbered by their families, by their fathers' house, were two thousand six hundred and thirty. These are the ones who were numbered of the

families of the sons of Gershon, of all who might serve in the tabernacle of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD. Those of the families of the sons of Merari who were numbered, by their families, by their fathers' house, from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tabernacle of meeting; those who were numbered by their families were three thousand two hundred. These are the ones who were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses. All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel numbered, by their families and by their fathers' houses, from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who came to do the work of service and the work of bearing burdens in the tabernacle of meeting; those who were numbered were eight thousand five hundred and eighty.

2. (49) The organization and order of the Levites.

According to the commandment of the LORD they were numbered by the hand of Moses, each according to his service and according to his task; thus were they numbered by him, as the LORD commanded Moses.

- a. **According to the commandment of the LORD they were numbered:** We remember that this census was commanded by God and had a definite purpose in His plan.
- b. **Each according to his service and according to his task:** Each of these had a role to play in doing the work of the tabernacle, and God made them all dependent on each other to do that work.

- i. "It is worthy of note that these Levites, although they were all equally consecrated to God, had not all exactly the same work to perform. God is not the God of all uniformity. There is a wondrous unity of plan and design in all that he does, but there is also an equally marvelous variety." (Spurgeon)
- ii. Paul says the church is to work like a body - many parts, looking different, doing different jobs, meeting different needs, some more visible, some less, but all essential - and all with the same DNA code.
- iii. Much trouble is caused in the service of the LORD by those who desire a different calling than they have, or who are jealous of those who have a different calling, or by those who exalt one calling and abase another. Everyone has a place and a job, and all can set themselves to do it.

Unclean People

Num 5:1 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 5:2 "Command the people of Israel to expel from the camp everyone with a dreaded skin disease or a bodily discharge and everyone who is unclean by contact with a corpse.

Num 5:3 Send all these ritually unclean people out, so that they will not defile the camp, where I live among my people."

Num 5:4 The Israelites obeyed and expelled them all from the camp.

Confession and Restitution

Num 5:5 The LORD gave Moses

Num 5:6 the following instructions for the people of Israel. When any of you are unfaithful to the LORD and commit a wrong against someone,

Num 5:7 you must confess your sin and make full repayment, plus an additional 20 percent, to the person you have wronged.

Num 5:8 But if that person has died and has no near relative to whom payment can be made, it shall be given to the LORD for the priest. This payment is in addition to the ram used to perform the ritual of purification for the guilty person.

Num 5:9 Also every special contribution which the Israelites offer to the LORD belongs to the priest to whom they present it.

Num 5:10 Each priest shall keep the offerings presented to him.

A Test for Adultery

Num 5:11 The LORD commanded Moses

Num 5:12 (12-14) to give the Israelites the following instructions. It may happen that a man becomes suspicious that his wife is unfaithful to him and has defiled herself by having intercourse with another man. But the husband may not be certain, for his wife may have kept it secret—there was no witness, and she was not caught in the act. Or it may happen that a husband becomes suspicious of his wife, even though she has not been unfaithful.

Num 5:15 In either case the man shall take his wife to the priest. He shall also take the required offering of two pounds of barley flour, but he shall not pour any olive oil on it or put any incense on it, because it is an offering from a suspicious husband, made to bring the truth to light.

Num 5:16 The priest shall bring the woman forward and have her stand in front of the altar.

Num 5:17 He shall pour some holy water into a clay bowl and take some of the earth that is on the floor of the Tent of the LORD's presence and put it in the water to make it bitter.

Num 5:18 Then he shall loosen the woman's hair and put the offering of flour in her hands. In his hands the priest shall hold the bowl containing the bitter water that brings a curse.

Num 5:19 Then the priest shall make the woman agree to this oath spoken by the priest: "If you have not committed adultery, you will not be harmed by the curse that this water brings.

Num 5:20 But if you have committed adultery,

Num 5:21 may the LORD make your name a curse among your people. May he cause your genital organs to shrink and your stomach to swell up.

Num 5:22 May this water enter your stomach and cause it to swell up and your genital organs to shrink." The woman shall respond, "I agree; may the LORD do so."

Num 5:23 Then the priest shall write this curse down and wash the writing off into the bowl of bitter water.

Num 5:24 Before he makes the woman drink the water, which may then cause her bitter pain,

Num 5:25 the priest shall take the offering of flour out of the woman's hands, hold it out in dedication to the LORD, and present it on the altar.

Num 5:26 Then he shall take a handful of it as a token offering and burn it on the altar. Finally, he shall make the woman drink the water.

Num 5:27 If she has committed adultery, the water will cause bitter pain; her stomach will swell up and her genital organs will shrink. Her name will become a curse among her people.

Num 5:28 But if she is innocent, she will not be harmed and will be able to bear children.

Num 5:29 (29-30) This is the law in cases where a man is jealous and becomes suspicious that his wife has committed

adultery. The woman shall be made to stand in front of the altar, and the priest shall perform this ritual.

Num 5:31 The husband shall be free of guilt, but the woman, if guilty, must suffer the consequences.

Numbers 5:1-31

Numbers 5 - Separating from Sin

A. Separation from the effects of sin.

1. (1-2) *The command to put out of the camp those who were unclean.*

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a corpse."

a. **Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp:** As Israel prepared to march to the Promised Land, the leper (Leviticus 13), those with a discharge (Leviticus 15), and any priest who would touch a dead body, except that of a close relative (Lev 21:1) were commanded to be put out of the camp of Israel until ceremonially clean. Now God said that Israel must do what He had previously commanded.

i. "Probably this ordinance gave the first idea of a *hospital*, where all those who are afflicted with contagious disorders are put into particular wards, under medical treatment." (Clarke)

b. **Put out of the camp:** It wasn't that any of these things made a person or proved them to be a notorious sinner (though that was often wrongly assumed); but leprosy, unclean discharges, and dead bodies were reminders of the effects of sin - from which Israel must separate as they prepare to march on the Promised Land.

i. Might this also be an analogy of our sin nature inherited from Adam? Even as a leper does not choose leprosy, but inherits it, so our sin nature is not chosen - but inherited from Adam. Of course, we choose individual acts of sin, but our sin nature was inherited.

ii. Clearly, at this stage in Israel's progression to the Promised Land, they have been organized and ordered by God - now, they will be challenged to purity. God is looking to make Israel a Promised Land people - and that means a purified people.

2. (3-4) *The breadth and reason of the command.*

"You shall put out both male and female; you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell." And the children of Israel did so, and put them outside the camp; as the LORD spoke to Moses, so the children of Israel did.

a. **You shall put out both male and female:** You shall put out both male and female: Neither male nor female was to be excluded from this command. Neither perceived sympathy nor perceived superiority could spare someone the consequences of sin's ravages.

b. **In the midst of which I dwell:** The great reason for this commanded separation is because God lives in the camp of Israel, so sin and its effects must be separated from.

i. God is concerned with far more than our individual acts of sin; He demands our sin nature be addressed. Only in Jesus can our sin nature - the old man - be crucified, and the nature of Jesus - the new man - be granted to us as new creations. God can't abide with the old man but can with the new man.

ii. You can't be a Promised Land person if the ravages of sin are openly evident in your life. Certainly, Promised Land people are not sinlessly perfect; but they are not openly, obviously, walking in the sin nature - well illustrated by those set outside the camp.

B. Separation from the damage our sin does.

1. (5-7) The command to make restitution.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel: 'When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the LORD, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give it to the one he has wronged.'"

a. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full:

Because restitution is commanded, this is obviously a case of sinning against another person (such as with theft, Lev 5:14 to Lev 6:7) or withholding from God that which belongs to Him.

b. Plus one-fifth of it: The restitution previously commanded must now be made - repaying that which was taken or withheld and adding a 20% penalty.

2. (8) How to make restitution to the dead.

But if the man has no relative to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution for the wrong must go to the LORD for the priest, in addition to the ram of the atonement with which atonement is made for him.

a. The restitution for the wrong must go to the LORD: If there is not a surviving kinsman to make restitution to, then the restitution payment must go to the LORD. The payment of restitution was just as

important - if not *more* important - for the guilty one paying it as it was for the victim receiving it.

3. (9-10) *The right of every Israelite to partake of the offerings he brought.*

Every offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall be his. And every man's holy things shall be his; whatever any man gives the priest shall be his.

a. **Every offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall be his:** Certain offerings (such as the peace offering of Leviticus 3) were intended to have a portion of the offering (like a good piece of meat) returned, so they and their family could have a fellowship meal with the LORD.

b. **And every man's holy things shall be his:** This command reminds of the absolute right the offerer had to share in such offerings; it is essentially a way to preserve an open door for fellowship with the LORD - the priest couldn't take the offerer's portion away, a king couldn't tax it away.

i. In the midst of this chapter on the separation from sin, God therefore reminds Israel of the purpose of this separation - fellowship with God. This, ultimately, is the reason to pursue purity: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Mat 5:8).

C. Separation from the suspicion of sin.

1. (11-14) *The situation.*

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'If any man's wife goes astray and behaves unfaithfully toward him, and a man lies with her carnally, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and it is concealed that she has

defiled herself, and there was no witness against her, nor was she caught; if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, who has defiled herself; or if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, although she has not defiled herself;”

a. **If any man's wife goes astray and behaves unfaithfully toward him:** This unique passage deals with the problem of a **spirit of jealousy** in a marriage. Obviously, unfounded jealousy has spoiled many a marriage, and justified jealousy has forced attention on confronting the sin of adultery - in this passage, God gives Israel a way to deal with it.

i. “This law was given partly to deter wives from adulterous practices, and partly to secure wives against the rage of their hard-hearted husbands, who otherwise might upon mere suspicions destroy them, or at least put them away.” (Poole)

b. **If the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife:** Sometimes jealousy in a marriage is revealed to be completely justified; other times it is found to be completely false. Either way, God knows it means something must be dealt with, and here He gives Israel a way to do it.

i. Often, our spouse knows if we have given our bodies - or our hearts - to another, no matter how desperately one tries to hide it. Other times, jealousy is just plain off the wall - and also needs to be resolved.

2. (15) *The offering to resolve a spirit of jealousy.*

Then the man shall bring his wife to the priest. He shall bring the offering required for her, one-tenth of an EPHAH of barley meal; he shall pour no oil on it

and put no frankincense on it, because it *is* a grain offering of jealousy, an offering for remembering, for bringing iniquity to remembrance.

a. Then the man shall bring his wife to the priest:

The jealous husband was to bring a certain amount of **barley meal**, and this grain only - not accompanied by any oil or frankincense, things which customarily accompanied a grain offering.

b. He shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it: There was to be no oil or frankincense - which were thought to sweeten a typical grain offering; but there is nothing sweet about this **offering for remembrance, for bringing iniquity to remembrance.** This offering was truly bitter, not sweet, because either a wife would be found guilty of adultery, or a husband found guilty of unfounded suspicion.

c. For bringing iniquity to remembrance: It wasn't that perhaps the wife committed adultery and didn't "remember" it; it was not for the husband or wife to remember, but for the whole community to remember the terrible nature of either adultery or false accusation.

3. (16-28) The ceremony of the offering.

And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the LORD. The priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put *it* into the water. Then the priest shall stand the woman before the LORD, uncover the woman's head, and put the offering for remembering in her hands, which *is* the grain offering of jealousy. And the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that brings a curse. And the priest shall put her under oath, and say to the woman, "If no man has lain with you, and if you have not gone astray to uncleanness while under your

husband's authority, be free from this bitter water that brings a curse. But if you have gone astray *while under your husband's authority*, and if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has lain with you"; then the priest shall put the woman under the oath of the curse, and he shall say to the woman; "the LORD make you a curse and an oath among your people, when the LORD makes your thigh rot and your belly swell; and may this water that causes the curse go into your stomach, and make *your belly swell and your thigh rot.*" Then the woman shall say, "Amen, so be it." Then the priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall scrape *them* off into the bitter water. And he shall make the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse, and the water that brings the curse shall enter her *to become* bitter. Then the priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman's hand, shall wave the offering before the LORD, and bring it to the altar; and the priest shall take a handful of the offering, as its memorial portion, burn *it* on the altar, and afterward make the woman drink the water. When he has made her drink the water, then it shall be, if she has defiled herself and behaved unfaithfully toward her husband, that the water that brings a curse will enter her *and become* bitter, and her belly will swell, her thigh will rot, and the woman will become a curse among her people. But if the woman has not defiled herself, and is clean, then she shall be free and may conceive children.

- a. **Take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it into the water:** This water was made bitter from the **dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle;** and while the woman held the grain

offering in her hand (a reminder of fellowship with God), the priest pronounced an oath over the woman.

- i. The idea of the phrase **uncover the woman's head** (Num 5:18) is to unbind and "let down" her hair. "The unbinding of the woman's hair is another hint that she was viewed as unclean. 'Lepers' had to let their hair hang loose as a mark of their uncleanness." (Wenham)
- b. **The priest shall put her under oath, and say to the woman:** In his oath, the priest would solemnly announce that if the woman was innocent of the accusation of adultery, she would **be free from this bitter water that brings a curse**. But if she was in fact guilty of adultery, she would be under the curse.
 - i. The effect of the curse was to make **your thigh** (here, a euphemism for the womb) **rot and your belly swell**.
 - ii. After the priest said this, the woman had to respond: **Amen, so be it**. She had to agree that if she was innocent, she deserved vindication; but if guilty, she deserved the punishment of the curse. She was *not* allowed the option of saying, "well, I did it, but it was really all right in the sight of God. After all, we loved each other, or my husband neglected me, and . . ." At the very least, this ceremony demanded that sin be called sin - guilty or innocent!
- c. **The priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall scrape them off into the bitter water:** After reading the curse, and hearing the woman's agreement, the priest would write the oath on a scroll - and scrape the dried ink **into the bitter water**.
 - i. Think of what made the water bitter: Both the "holy dust" of the tabernacle floor, and the oath containing

a curse to the sinner! The combination of seeing the holiness of God *and* the penalty to sinners truly is **bitter!**

d. **The priest shall take the grain offering:** After this, the priest would offer the grain offering - a picture of fellowship and thanks to God - and the accused woman would drink the bitter water.

e. **The water that brings a curse will enter her and become bitter:** Over time, the judgment of God would be evident. If she came down with some type of internal disease, especially affecting her womb, it would be seen as evidence of her guilt. But if she was free from disease, and continued to bear children, it would be seen as vindication.

i. "The rabbins say that the trial by the waters of jealousy was omitted after the Babylonish captivity, because adulteries were so frequent amongst them, that they were afraid of having the name of the Lord profaned by being so frequently appealed to!" (Clarke)

ii. The rabbis also said that if the woman was guilty, the same disease would come upon the man she had committed adultery with; but they also said that even if the wife had been guilty, but her husband had been guilty of adultery also, the bitter water would have no effect on her.

f. Observations.

i. Clearly, this is evidence that God does not want couples to live in an on-going state of jealousy. He gave a mechanism how jealous feelings could either be proved or disproved, and the relationship would deal with the truth from there.

ii. This ceremony only dealt with an adulterous wife and not a husband because for the most part, the Mosaic Law was "case law" - not meant to anticipate every potential situation, but to give examples that will set precedence for other cases. It is likely that the same ceremony would be practiced if a wife became suspicious of a husband's adultery.

iii. This ceremony could only work with some supernatural element involved; drinking dusty and inky water won't cause internal disease in only those guilty of adultery. But as well, the mental stress of knowing you are guilty and openly proclaiming the rightness of judgment upon the guilty, cannot be good for one's health!

iv. At the very least, this ceremony made the entire community (it was seemingly a public ceremony) aware of the evil of adultery - and the seriousness of trying to hide your sin. The existence of the ceremony itself was an incentive to faithfulness in marriage, and therefore good for the entire nation.

v. Surely, both the holiness of God and the perfection of His word testifies against us. We should be forced to drink a bitter cup that would destroy us. But Jesus drank it for us.

4. (29-31) Conclusion.

This is the law of jealousy, when a wife, while under her husband's authority, goes astray and defiles herself, or when the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man, and he becomes jealous of his wife; then he shall stand the woman before the LORD, and the priest shall execute all this law upon her. Then the man shall be free from iniquity, but that woman shall bear her guilt.

- a. **This is the law of jealousy:** This was a ceremony meant to resolve things. Either the husband was right or wrong in his jealousy; if his wife had in fact been adulterous, he was right - if not, wrong. The issue had to be settled, and this was God's way to do it.
- b. **The priest shall execute all this law:** The last two matters of purity - in regard to restitution and resolving jealousy - look to make Israel a pure, Promised Land people in their personal relationships. You can't be a Promised Land person if your relationships with others stink! You must make restitution and get things resolved.

The Nazirite Vow

Num 6:1 The LORD commanded Moses

Num 6:2 to give the following instructions to the people of Israel. Any of you, male or female, who make a special vow to become a nazirite and dedicate yourself to the LORD

Num 6:3 shall abstain from wine and beer. You shall not drink any kind of drink made from grapes or eat any grapes or raisins.

Num 6:4 As long as you are a nazirite, you shall not eat anything that comes from a grapevine, not even the seeds or skins of grapes.

Num 6:5 As long as you are under the nazirite vow, you must not cut your hair or shave. You are bound by the vow for the full time that you are dedicated to the LORD, and you shall let your hair grow.

Num 6:6 (6-7) Your hair is the sign of your dedication to God, and so you must not defile yourself by going near a corpse, not even that of your father, mother, brother, or sister.

Num 6:8 As long as you are a nazirite, you are consecrated to the LORD.

Num 6:9 If your consecrated hair is defiled because you are right beside someone who suddenly dies, you must wait seven days and then shave your head; and so you become ritually clean.

Num 6:10 On the eighth day you shall bring two doves or two pigeons to the priest at the entrance of the Tent of the LORD's presence.

Num 6:11 The priest shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, to perform the ritual of purification for you because of your contact with a corpse. On the same day you shall reconsecrate your hair

Num 6:12 and rededicate to the LORD your time as a nazirite. The previous period of time doesn't count, because your consecrated hair was defiled. As a repayment offering you shall bring a one-year-old lamb.

Num 6:13 When you complete your nazirite vow, you shall perform this ritual. You shall go to the entrance of the Tent

Num 6:14 and present to the LORD three animals without any defects: a one-year-old male lamb for a burnt offering, a one-year-old ewe lamb for a sin offering, and a ram for a fellowship offering.

Num 6:15 You shall also offer a basket of bread made without yeast: thick loaves made of flour mixed with olive oil and thin cakes brushed with olive oil, and in addition the required offerings of grain and wine.

Num 6:16 The priest shall present all these to the LORD and offer the sin offering and the burnt offering.

Num 6:17 He shall sacrifice the ram to the LORD as a fellowship offering, and offer it with the basket of bread; he shall also present the offerings of grain and wine.

Num 6:18 At the entrance of the Tent you nazirites shall shave off your hair and put it on the fire on which the fellowship offering is being burned.

Num 6:19 Then, when the shoulder of the ram is boiled, the priest shall take it and put it, together with one thick loaf of bread and one thin cake from the basket, into the hands of the nazirite.

Num 6:20 Next, the priest shall present them as a special gift to the LORD; they are a sacred offering for the priest, in addition to the breast and the leg of the ram which by law belong to the priest. After that, the nazirite may drink wine.

Num 6:21 These are the regulations for you nazirites; but if you promise an offering beyond what your vow requires you to give, you must fulfill exactly the promise you made.

Aaron's Blessing

Num 6:22 The LORD commanded Moses

Num 6:23 to tell Aaron and his sons to use the following words in blessing the people of Israel:

Num 6:24 May the LORD bless you and take care of you;

Num 6:25 May the LORD be kind and gracious to you;

Num 6:26 May the LORD look on you with favor and give you peace.

Num 6:27 And the LORD said, "If they pronounce my name as a blessing upon the people of Israel, I will bless them."

Numbers 6:1-27

Numbers 6 - The Vow of a Nazirite

A. The vow of a Nazirite.

1. (1-2) The purpose for the vow of a Nazirite.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When either a man or woman consecrates an offering to take the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD,'"

a. **To separate himself to the LORD:** The vow of the Nazirite was to express one's special desire to draw close to God and to separate one's self from the comforts and pleasures of this world.

i. "The English word *Nazirite* transliterates Hebrew *nazir*, meaning "set apart." (Wenham)

b. **To take the vow of a Nazirite:** There were several remarkable Nazirites in the Bible: Samson (Jdg 13:5), John the Baptist (Luk 1:15), and Paul (Act 18:18); the vow was certainly open to women, but we have no Biblical example of a woman taking the vow, except for Manoah's wife during her pregnancy with Samson (Jdg 13:4).

2. (3-8) Requirements for fulfilling the vow of a Nazirite.

He shall separate himself from wine and *similar* drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from *similar* drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin. All the days of the vow of his separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD, he shall be holy. Then he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. All the days that he separates himself to the LORD he shall not go near a dead body. He shall not make himself unclean even for his father or his mother, for his brother or his sister, when they die, because his separation to God *is* on his head. All the days of his separation he shall be holy to the LORD.

a. **He shall separate himself from wine and *similar* drink:** The Nazirite was forbidden to eat or drink anything from the grape vine; this was a form of self-denial connected with the idea of a special consecration

to God. Generally speaking, wine and grape products were thought to be a blessing (Pro 3:10), something to be gratefully received from God (Psa 104:15).

b. **No razor shall come upon his head:** The hair was to be allowed to grow all during the period of the vow, and then cut at the conclusion of the vow. This was a way of outwardly demonstrating to the world that this man or woman was under a special vow.

- i. In the case of Samson, his strength came from his Nazirite's vow of consecration and separation to God - so when Delilah cut his hair (the most public, visible example of the vow), his strength was lost.
- ii. Samson had broken the vow before - both at drinking parties (Jdg 14:10), and at touching a dead carcass (Jdg 14:8-9). But not in the most obviously public way of allowing his hair to be cut. There is a sense in which public sins *do* matter more because they bring more reproach to the name of God.

c. **He shall not go near a dead body:** Dead bodies - even those of a close relative - were not to be approached during the vow of a Nazirite. Separation from death - the effect of sin - was essential during the period of the vow.

3. (9-12) *Consequences of breaking the vow.*

And if anyone dies very suddenly beside him, and he defiles his consecrated head, then he shall shave his head on the day of his cleansing; on the seventh day he shall shave it. Then on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting; and the priest shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, and make atonement for him, because he sinned in regard to the corpse; and

he shall sanctify his head that same day. He shall consecrate to the LORD the days of his separation, and bring a male lamb in its first year as a trespass offering; but the former days shall be lost, because his separation was defiled.

- a. **If anyone dies very suddenly beside him:** If one's vow was broken - perhaps by someone dropping dead next to the Nazirite! Then the Nazirite's hair was to be shaved off, sacrifice made, and the vow would begin all over again.
- b. **But the former days shall be lost, because his separation was defiled:** "The Mishna relates how Queen Helena had almost completed seven years of a Nazirite vow when she was defiled and therefore had to keep it for another seven years." (Wenham)

B. Concluding the vow of a Nazirite.

1. (13-15) Items needed for sacrifice.

Now this is the law of the Nazirite: When the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall be brought to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. And he shall present his offering to the LORD: one male lamb in its first year without blemish as a burnt offering, one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish as a sin offering, one ram without blemish as a peace offering, a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and their grain offering with their drink offerings.

- a. **He shall be brought to the door of the tabernacle of meeting:** The vow of a Nazirite ended with a public ceremony, with extensive sacrifice: **One male lamb... one ewe lamb... one ram... a basket of unleavened bread... drink offerings.**

b. **He shall present his offering to the LORD:** No wonder when Paul visited Jerusalem, he was invited to pay the expenses of some Christians who had taken a Nazirite vow and were ready to conclude it with this sacrifice (Act 21:23-24). The Nazirite vow was not something that could be entered into lightly.

2. (16-21) *The sacrifice offered.*

Then the priest shall bring *them* before the LORD and offer his sin offering and his burnt offering; and he shall offer the ram as a sacrifice of peace offering to the LORD, with the basket of unleavened bread; the priest shall also offer its grain offering and its drink offering. Then the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offering. And the priest shall take the boiled shoulder of the ram, one unleavened cake from the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and put *them* upon the hands of the Nazirite after he has shaved his consecrated hair, and the priest shall wave them as a wave offering before the LORD; they are holy for the priest, together with the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the heave offering. After that the Nazirite may drink wine. "This is the law of the Nazirite who vows to the LORD the offering for his separation, and besides that, whatever else his hand is able to provide; according to the vow which he takes, so he must do according to the law of his separation."

a. **Then the priest shall bring them before the LORD:** The priest and the Nazirite would sacrifice each item, and at the conclusion of the sacrifice, the vow would be completed.

C. The priestly blessing.

1. (22-23) The command to bless the people.

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:”"

a. **This is the way you shall bless:** Moses, Aaron, and their spiritual descendants were commanded to bless the people, and they were to do it according to the formula detailed in the following verses.

i. "The priests were always there pronouncing this blessing at the close of the daily morning service in the temple and later in the synagogues." (Wenham)

b. **Say to them:** It is unusual to have a rote prayer given in the Scriptures.

i. "Free prayer is most useful, and it will ordinarily consort best with the movements of the free Spirit; but in the case of a benediction, it is well that it was dictated to the man of God. The children of Israel might miss blessing through the ignorance, or forgetfulness, or unbelief of Aaron; and therefore it was not left to him; but he had to learn by heart each word and sentence. In this wise, and in no other, was he to bless the people. I like this; for if God himself puts the very words into the mouth of his priest, then they are God's words." (Spurgeon)

2. (24-26) The Aaronic blessing.

**"The LORD bless you and keep you;
The LORD make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you peace."**

a. **The LORD bless you:** This simple desire prefaces everything. God loves to bless His people, and He loves to have leaders long that the people be blessed. This also

recognizes that all blessing really comes from God; and without His blessing, all is futile.

i. We remember also that God's blessing has always in mind our greatest and highest good; we often expect God's blessing in our life to mean a world of comfort and ease - but that certainly isn't for our greatest and highest good. God knows how you need to be blessed, even if you don't!

ii. We have often settled for *happiness* or *comfort* or *wealth* when God wanted us to be *blessed*. True *blessing* from God is higher than happiness or wealth or comfort.

b. **And keep you:** To be kept by the LORD is blessing indeed. Some are *kept* by their own sin and desire, some are *kept* by idolatry and greed, and others are *kept* by their own bitterness and anger. But to be kept by the LORD insures life, peace, and success.

c. **The LORD make His face to shine upon you:** To have the glorious, happy face of God shining upon man is the greatest gift one could have. To know that as God looks upon you, He is well pleased - not because of who you are, or what you have done, but because you are in Jesus Christ - there is no greater source of peace and power in life.

i. We can imagine a father disciplining his son and putting the son out of his presence - and then receiving the son back to see his face again. This is how God receives sinners who come to Jesus by faith.

ii. "Why should he fret when God smiles? What matters though all the world should censure, if Jehovah countenances his servant. A look of approval from God creates a deep, delightful calm within the soul." (Spurgeon)

d. **And be gracious to you:** The idea is that God shows tender mercy and care for His people.

e. **The LORD lift up His countenance upon you:** The priest prays God would look upon His people; when God blesses, keeps, shines, and is gracious towards His people, any look He casts towards His people is filled with nothing but blessing. His loving attention is on the believer!

To lift up one's eyes or face means to pay attention

f. **And give you peace:** The Hebrew word is *shalom*, which is more than the cessation of hostility - it is God's word for wholeness and goodness and total satisfaction in life. This is the abundant life Jesus promised! (Joh 10:10)

g. **The LORD... the LORD... the LORD:** The three-fold repetition of *LORD* does not prove the Trinity, but it certainly illustrates it.

- *God the Father* blesses and keeps His children
- *God the Son* makes God's face to shine on us and brings us grace
- *God the Holy Spirit* communicates God's attention to us, and gives us peace

i. "I will not say that this teaches the doctrine of the Trinity; but I must say that, believing the doctrine of the Trinity, I understand the passage all the better. The shadow of the Triune God is on the sacred benediction in the name thrice repeated." (Spurgeon)

h. **You... you... you... you... you... you:** It is repeated six times for emphasis - God wants to bless **you**. We often feel as if God really wanted to bless someone else. He wants to bless *us*.

i. "So long as you are resting upon Christ—Jesus, the great High Priest, speaks from the eternal glory, and he says, 'The Lord bless thee.' 'Oh! but I do not deserve it.' Just so; but 'the Lord Bless thee.' 'I am so unworthy, I am so backsliding.' Yes, but the Lord Jesus Christ knows all, covers all. We will read it, then: 'The Lord Bless *thee* - *thee*, and keep *thee*: the Lord make his face to shine upon *thee*, and be gracious unto *thee*: the Lord lift up his countenance upon *thee*, and give *thee* peace.' Oh! have you got that wrought into your very hearts?" (Spurgeon)

ii. As God bestows His blessing on us, we must receive it by faith. We must be like Jacob - who would not let go of God until God blessed him.

3. (27) *The fruit of the blessing.*

So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.

a. **So they shall put My name on the children of Israel:** To be blessed by God is to have His name on you - to be identified with who He is and all His nature. This was a great gift, to have God's name upon them.

i. Aaron was commanded to pronounce this blessing over the people of Israel - not over the other nations. Though God blesses all mankind, there is a definite and strong sense in which He has blessing *only* for His people. We have to join ourselves to Him to gain that blessing.

b. **And I will bless them:** God *promises* to bless in response to this blessing! How appropriate for pastors to pronounce these words over their people! How much more appropriate for every believer to remember that we have a High Priest in heaven who ever lives to intercede for us and to bless us!

i. "When God saith, 'I will,' all the devils in hell cannot turn aside the blessing, and all the ages of eternity cannot change the King's word." (Spurgeon)

ii. "The Lord has blessed his people, and he would have them know it. He has blessed them with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and it is his wish that they should experience the fullness of this blessedness. Are any of the Lord's people without a sense of this blessing? It is not the will of God that you should continue in this low condition." (Spurgeon)

Offerings at the Tabernacle's Consecration

Num 7:1 On the day Moses finished setting up the Tent of the LORD's presence, he anointed and dedicated the Tent and all its equipment, and the altar and all its equipment.

Num 7:2 Then the clan chiefs who were leaders in the tribes of Israel, the same men who were in charge of the census,

Num 7:3 brought their offerings to the LORD: six wagons and twelve oxen, a wagon for every two leaders and an ox for each leader. After they had presented them,

Num 7:4 the LORD said to Moses,

Num 7:5 "Accept these gifts for use in the work to be done for the Tent; give them to the Levites according to the work they have to do."

Num 7:6 So Moses gave the wagons and the oxen to the Levites.

Num 7:7 He gave two wagons and four oxen to the Gershonites,

Num 7:8 and four wagons and eight oxen to the Merarites. All their work was to be done under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron.

Num 7:9 But Moses gave no wagons or oxen to the Kohathites, because the sacred objects they took care of had to be carried on their shoulders.

Num 7:10 The leaders also brought offerings to celebrate the dedication of the altar. When they were ready to present their gifts at the altar,

Num 7:11 the LORD said to Moses, "Tell them that each day for a period of twelve days one of the leaders is to present his gifts for the dedication of the altar."

Num 7:12 (12-83) They presented their offerings in the following order:

Day	Tribe	Leader
1st	Judah	Nahshon son of Amminadab
2nd	Issachar	Nethanel son of Zuar
3rd	Zebulun	Eliab son of Helon
4th	Reuben	Elizur son of Shedeur
5th	Simeon	Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai
6th	Gad	Eliasaph son of Deuel
7th	Ephraim	Elishama son of Ammihud
8th	Manasseh	Gamaliel son of Pedahzur
9th	Benjamin	Abidan son of Gideoni
10th	Dan	Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai
11th	Asher	Pagiel son of Ochran
12th	Naphtali	Ahira son of Enan

The offerings each one brought were identical: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces and one silver basin weighing 30 ounces, by the official standard, both of them full of flour mixed with oil for the grain offering; one gold dish weighing 4 ounces, full of incense; one young bull, one ram, and a

one-year-old lamb, for the burnt offering; one goat for the sin offering; and two bulls, five rams, five goats, and five one-year-old lambs, for the fellowship offering.

Num 7:84 (84-88) The totals of the offerings brought by the twelve leaders for the dedication of the altar were as follows: –twelve silver bowls and twelve silver basins weighing a total of 60 pounds –twelve gold dishes weighing a total of 48 ounces, filled with incense –twelve bulls, twelve rams, and twelve one-year-old lambs, plus the grain offerings that go with them, for the burnt offerings –twelve goats for the sin offerings –twenty-four bulls, sixty rams, sixty goats, sixty one-year-old lambs, for the fellowship offerings

Num 7:89 When Moses went into the Tent to talk with the LORD, he heard the LORD speaking to him from above the lid on the Covenant Box, between the two winged creatures.

Numbers 7:1-89

Numbers 7 - The Gifts of the Twelve Tribes

A. The giving of the first gifts.

1. (1-3) Six carts and twelve oxen offered at the conclusion of the building of the tabernacle.

Now it came to pass, when Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle, that he anointed it and consecrated it and all its furnishings, and the altar and all its utensils; so he anointed them and consecrated them. Then the leaders of Israel, the heads of their fathers' houses, who were the leaders of the tribes and over those who were numbered, made an offering. And they brought their offering before the LORD, six covered carts and twelve oxen, a cart for every two of the leaders, and for each one an ox; and they presented them before the tabernacle.

- a. **When Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle:** Seemingly, the book of Numbers is out of chronological order here. This special offering may have happened before the events of Numbers 1.
- b. **And they brought their offering before the LORD:** The leaders of each tribe bring a total of six carts (**a cart for every two of the leaders**) and twelve oxen (**each one an ox**), given to transport the tabernacle through the wilderness.
- c. **Six covered carts and twelve oxen:** At this time, such carts were a great luxury - and no doubt, a significant offering from the tribes.

2. (4-9) *The distribution of the carts and oxen.*

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Accept these from them, that they may be used in doing the work of the tabernacle of meeting; and you shall give them to the Levites, to every man according to his service." So Moses took the carts and the oxen, and gave them to the Levites. Two carts and four oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon, according to their service; and four carts and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari, according to their service, under the authority of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. But to the sons of Kohath he gave none, because theirs was the service of the holy things, **which** they carried on their shoulders.

- a. **Two carts and four oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon:** The family of Gershon received two carts with their four oxen; they had the responsibility of transporting the fabrics of the tabernacle (Num 4:25-26).
- b. **Four carts and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari:** The family of Merari received four carts with

their eight oxen; they had the job of transporting the boards and pillars of the tabernacle (Num 4:31-32).

c. **But to the sons of Kohath he gave none:** The family of Kohath received no carts, and no oxen; they were to carry the holy furniture of the tabernacle (Num 4:4) and were to carry all things on their shoulders - so, to remove the temptation to disobey, Moses gave them no carts!

B. The second giving of gifts.

1. (10-11) *Twelve leaders of the twelve tribes to bring dedication gifts to the tabernacle, one on each day for twelve days.*

Now the leaders offered the dedication offering for the altar when it was anointed; so the leaders offered their offering before the altar. For the LORD said to Moses, "They shall offer their offering, one leader each day, for the dedication of the altar."

2. (12-88) *The giving of the dedication offerings over twelve days.*

And the one who offered his offering on the first day was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, from the tribe of Judah. His offering was one silver platter, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty shekels, and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; one gold pan of ten shekels, full of incense; one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; one kid of the goats as a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Nahshon the son of Amminadab.

On the second day Nethanel the son of Zuar, leader of Issachar, presented *an offering*. For his offering he offered one silver platter, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty *shekels*, and one silver bowl of seventy *shekels*, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; one gold pan of ten *shekels*, full of incense; one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; one kid of the goats as a sin offering; and as the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Nethanel the son of Zuar.

On the third day Eliab the son of Helon, leader of the children of Zebulun, presented *an offering*. His offering was one silver platter, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty *shekels*, and one silver bowl of seventy *shekels*, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; one gold pan of ten *shekels*, full of incense; one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; one kid of the goats as a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Eliab the son of Helon.

On the fourth day Elizur the son of Shedeur, leader of the children of Reuben, presented *an offering*. His offering was one silver platter, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty *shekels*, and one silver bowl of seventy *shekels*, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; one gold pan of ten *shekels*, full of incense; one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering;

one kid of the goats as a sin offering; and as the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Elizur the son of Shedeur.

On the fifth day Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai, leader of the children of Simeon, *presented an offering*. His offering was one silver platter, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty *shekels*, and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; one gold pan of ten *shekels*, full of incense; one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; one kid of the goats as a sin offering; and as the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai.

On the sixth day Eliasaph the son of Deuel, leader of the children of Gad, *presented an offering*. His offering was one silver platter, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty *shekels*, and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; one gold pan of ten *shekels*, full of incense; one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; one kid of the goats as a sin offering; and as the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Eliasaph the son of Deuel.

On the seventh day Elishama the son of Ammihud, leader of the children of Ephraim, *presented an offering*. His offering was one silver platter, the

weight of which was one hundred and thirty *shekels*, and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; one gold pan of ten *shekels*, full of incense; one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; one kid of the goats as a sin offering; and as the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Elishama the son of Ammihud.

On the eighth day Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur, leader of the children of Manasseh, presented an offering. His offering was one silver platter, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty *shekels*, and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; one gold pan of ten *shekels*, full of incense; one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; one kid of the goats as a sin offering; and as the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur.

On the ninth day Abidan the son of Gideoni, leader of the children of Benjamin, presented an offering. His offering was one silver platter, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty *shekels*, and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; one gold pan of ten *shekels*, full of incense; one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; one kid of the goats as a sin offering; and as the

sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Abidan the son of Gideoni.

On the tenth day Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai, leader of the children of Dan, presented an offering. His offering was one silver platter, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty *shekels*, and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; one gold pan of ten *shekels*, full of incense; one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; one kid of the goats as a sin offering; and as the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai.

On the eleventh day Pagiel the son of Ocran, leader of the children of Asher, presented an offering. His offering was one silver platter, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty *shekels*, and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; one gold pan of ten *shekels*, full of incense; one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; one kid of the goats as a sin offering; and as the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Pagiel the son of Ocran.

On the twelfth day Ahira the son of Enan, leader of the children of Naphtali, presented an offering. His offering was one silver platter, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty *shekels*, and one silver

bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; one gold pan of ten shekels, full of incense; one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; one kid of the goats as a sin offering; and as the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Ahira the son of Enan.

This was the dedication *offering* for the altar from the leaders of Israel, when it was anointed: twelve silver platters, twelve silver bowls, and twelve gold pans. Each silver platter weighed one hundred and thirty shekels and each bowl seventy shekels. All the silver of the vessels weighed two thousand four hundred shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. The twelve gold pans full of incense weighed ten shekels apiece, according to the shekel of the sanctuary; all the gold of the pans weighed one hundred and twenty shekels. All the oxen for the burnt offering were twelve young bulls, the rams twelve, the male lambs in their first year twelve, with their grain offering, and the kids of the goats as a sin offering twelve. And all the oxen for the sacrifice of peace offerings were twenty-four bulls, the rams sixty, the male goats sixty, and the lambs in their first year sixty. This was the dedication *offering* for the altar after it was anointed.

a. His offering was one silver platter: Each leader brought a silver platter and a silver bowl, each full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; a gold pan with incense, a bull, a ram, a male lamb, a young goat, two oxen, five rams, five adult goats, and five more lambs.

- i. Each silver plate weighed about three pounds, each silver bowl about two pounds, and a gold shovel about four ounces.
- ii. Clearly, this was *generous* giving. God must show Promised Land people how to be givers - one of the best measures of one who has moved from a slave mind-set to a Promised Land mind-set. The slave by nature is a taker because he is often unsure of provision. Promised land people are generous, because they trust in a God who promised to meet all their needs.

b. **His offering was one silver platter:** Each tribal leader brought exactly the same offering over the twelve days.

- i. Clearly, this was *humble* giving. By requiring the same gift from every tribe, God made sure that no tribe or tribal leader glorified himself through his giving. We must resist the tendency to give in order to be seen of men. Promised land people care about God's glory, not their own.

c. **This was the dedication offering for the altar from the leaders of Israel:** Each offering is recorded exactly the same way - seemingly, "wasting" space in the Scriptures. God's purpose was to draw attention to each tribe's offering, though they were all the same.

- i. Clearly, godly giving is always noticed by God, even if it is the same or less than many other gifts. God sees and "records" every gift given in a right heart, even if it is only worth two mites (Mar 12:42-44). Every gift from a promised-land kind of heart is noticed by God.

3. (89) Moses meets with God and hears His voice.

Now when Moses went into the tabernacle of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice of One speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the Testimony, from between the two cherubim; thus He spoke to him.

a. **Moses went into the tabernacle of meeting:**

Promised land people need leadership, and they need leadership that hears from God and knows His voice.

The Seven Lamps

Num 8:1 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 8:2 "Tell Aaron that when he puts the seven lamps on the lampstand, he should place them so that the light shines toward the front."

Num 8:3 Aaron obeyed and placed the lamps facing the front of the lampstand.

Num 8:4 From top to bottom the lampstand was made of hammered gold, according to the pattern that the LORD had shown Moses.

Cleansing of the Levites

Num 8:5 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 8:6 "Separate the Levites from the rest of the people of Israel and purify them

Num 8:7 in the following way: sprinkle them with the water of purification and have them shave their whole bodies and have them wash their clothes. Then they will be ritually clean.

Num 8:8 Then they are to take a young bull and the required grain offering of flour mixed with olive oil; and you are to take another bull for the sin offering.

Num 8:9 Then assemble the whole community of Israel and have the Levites stand in front of the Tent of my presence.

Num 8:10 The people of Israel are to place their hands on the heads of the Levites,

Num 8:11 and then Aaron shall dedicate the Levites to me as a special gift from the Israelites, so that they may do my work.

Num 8:12 The Levites shall then put their hands on the heads of the two bulls; one is to be offered as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, in order to perform the ritual of purification for the Levites.

Num 8:13 "Dedicate the Levites as a special gift to me, and put Aaron and his sons in charge of them.

Num 8:14 Separate the Levites in this way from the rest of the Israelites, so that they will belong to me.

Num 8:15 After you have purified and dedicated the Levites, they will be qualified to work in the Tent.

Num 8:16 I have claimed them in the place of all the first-born sons of the Israelites, and they belong to me alone.

Num 8:17 When I killed all the first-born in Egypt, I consecrated as my own the oldest son of each Israelite family and the first-born of every animal.

Num 8:18 I am now taking the Levites instead of all the first-born of the Israelites,

Num 8:19 and I assign the Levites to Aaron and his sons, as a gift from the Israelites, to work in the Tent for the people of Israel and to protect the Israelites from the disaster that would strike them if they came too near the Holy Place."

Num 8:20 So Moses, Aaron, and all the people of Israel dedicated the Levites, as the LORD commanded Moses.

Num 8:21 The Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes, and Aaron dedicated them as a special gift to the LORD. He also performed the ritual of purification for them.

Num 8:22 The people did everything the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites. And so the Levites were qualified to work in the Tent under Aaron and his sons.

Retirement of the Levites

Num 8:23 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 8:24 "From the age of twenty-five each Levite shall perform his duties in the Tent of my presence,

Num 8:25 and at the age of fifty he shall retire.

Num 8:26 After that, he may help his fellow Levites in performing their duties in the Tent, but he must not perform any service by himself. This is how you are to regulate the duties of the Levites."

Numbers 8:1-26

Numbers 8 - Lighting of the Lamps, the Levites Cleansed for Service

A. The lighting of the lamps.

1. (1-3) *Lamps are placed on the lampstand.*

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to Aaron, and say to him, 'When you arrange the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the lampstand.'" And Aaron did so; he arranged the lamps to face toward the front of the lampstand, as the LORD commanded Moses.

a. **When you arrange the lamps:** The lampstand was described and made in Exo 25:31-40; but the lampstand by itself could give no light. It had to have lamps placed upon it that gave light. All the lampstand could do was make the light more visible.

i. The lamps were fueled by oil; and would need to be continually filled with oil to provide constant light.

b. **He arranged the lamps to face toward the front of the lampstand:** Rev 1:20 makes lampstands a picture of the church; the church itself does not light the world, but it does provide a “platform” for Jesus’ light to be seen.

2. (4) *Description of the lampstand.*

Now this workmanship of the lampstand was hammered gold; from its shaft to its flowers it was hammered work. According to the pattern which the LORD had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand.

B. Cleansing and dedication of the Levites.

1. (5-7) *Cleansing and sprinkling.*

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them ceremonially. Thus you shall do to them to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purification on them, and let them shave all their body, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean.”

a. **Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them ceremonially:** The priests had their dedication back in Leviticus 8, 9. This was the dedication of the Levites. The priests seemed to have a more spiritually oriented service, but the Levites needed to be dedicated unto the LORD also. Even practical service needs a heart of dedication and consecration to the LORD.

b. **Sprinkle water of purification on them:** This ceremonial cleansing pictured a cleansing of sin. It was part of the new covenant as described in Eze 36:25 : *Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean.*

c. **Let them shave all their body:** This was also commanded in the ceremony for the purification of a

leper (Lev 14:9). The idea was of a new start, of being made like a baby all over again - as in being born again.

2. (8-15) *The dedication of the Levites through sacrifice.*

"Then let them take a young bull with its grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, and you shall take another young bull as a sin offering. And you shall bring the Levites before the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall gather together the whole congregation of the children of Israel. So you shall bring the Levites before the LORD, and the children of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites; and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD, like a wave offering from the children of Israel, that they may perform the work of the LORD. Then the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the young bulls, and you shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to the LORD, to make atonement for the Levites. And you shall stand the Levites before Aaron and his sons, and then offer them like a wave offering to the LORD. Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the children of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine. After that the Levites shall go in to service the tabernacle of meeting. So you shall cleanse them and offer them, like a wave offering."

a. **Then let them take a young bull with its grain offering:** As a bull is sacrificed, the children of Israel lay their hands on the Levites, to bless them and pray for their dedication before the LORD. It would be clear to both the Levites and the nation that the Levites were servants of both the LORD and the nation.

i. A **wave offering** would present something to God (such as a portion of meat or bread), and essentially say, "This is Yours, God." The nation came before

God, and essentially said, "These Levites belong to You, LORD."

b. **After that the Levites shall go in to service the tabernacle of meeting:** Real ministry isn't all about dedication ceremonies; it is about doing the work. After the dedication, it was time to get busy!

3. (16-19) *The Levites are regarded as Israel's firstborn given to God.*

"For they are wholly given to Me from among the children of Israel; I have taken them for Myself instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the children of Israel. For all the firstborn among the children of Israel are Mine, both man and beast; on the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them to Myself. I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn of the children of Israel. And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the work for the children of Israel in the tabernacle of meeting, and to make atonement for the children of Israel, that there be no plague among the children of Israel when the children of Israel come near the sanctuary."

a. **I have taken them for Myself instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the children of Israel:** This theme was previously stated in Num 3:40-51.

4. (20-22) *Doing what God had commanded for the cleansing, dedication, and work of the Levites.*

Thus Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel did to the Levites; according to all that the LORD commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so the children of Israel did to them. And the

Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes; then Aaron presented them, like a wave offering before the LORD, and Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them. After that the Levites went in to do their work in the tabernacle of meeting before Aaron and his sons; as the LORD commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them.

5. (23-26) *The time of service for Levites.*

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "This is what pertains to the Levites: From twenty-five years old and above one may enter to perform service in the work of the tabernacle of meeting; and at the age of fifty years they must cease performing this work, and shall work no more. They may minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of meeting, to attend to needs, but they *themselves* shall do no work. Thus you shall do to the Levites regarding their duties."

- a. **From twenty-five years old and above:** A Levite's time of active service was to begin at age thirty and last until fifty according to Num 4:3; Num 4:23; Num 4:30. Yet their formal training began at age twenty-five, with a five-year apprenticeship.
- b. **Thus you shall do to the Levites regarding their duties:** This chapter shows that Promised Land people must be cleansed, dedicated, and doing the work.

The Passover Celebrated

Num 9:1 The LORD spoke to Moses in the Sinai Desert in the first month of the second year after the people of Israel had left Egypt. He said,

Num 9:2 (2-3) "On the fourteenth day of this month, beginning at sunset, the people of Israel are to observe the Passover according to all the rules and regulations for it."

Num 9:4 So Moses told the people to observe the Passover,

Num 9:5 and on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month they did so in the Sinai Desert. The people did everything just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

Num 9:6 But there were some people who were ritually unclean because they had touched a corpse, and they were not able to keep the Passover on that day. They went to Moses and Aaron

Num 9:7 and said, "We are unclean because we have touched a corpse, but why should we be excluded from presenting the LORD's offering with the rest of the Israelites?"

Num 9:8 Moses answered, "Wait until I receive instructions from the LORD."

Num 9:9 The LORD told Moses

Num 9:10 to say to the people of Israel, "When any of you or your descendants are unclean from touching a corpse or are far away on a journey, but still want to keep the Passover,

Num 9:11 you are permitted to observe it one month later instead, on the evening of the fourteenth day of the second month. Celebrate it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

Num 9:12 Do not leave any of the food until the following morning and do not break any of the animal's bones. Observe the Passover according to all the regulations.

Num 9:13 But if any of you are ritually clean and not away on a journey and do not observe the Passover, you shall no longer be considered my people, because you did not present the offering to me at the appointed time. You must suffer the consequences of your sin.

Num 9:14 "If foreigners living among you want to keep the Passover, they must observe it according to all the rules and

regulations. The same law applies to everyone, whether native or foreigner."

The Cloud Covering the Tabernacle

Num 9:15 (15-16) On the day the Tent of the LORD's presence was set up, a cloud came and covered it. At night the cloud looked like fire.

Num 9:17 Whenever the cloud lifted, the people of Israel broke camp, and they set up camp again in the place where the cloud came down.

Num 9:18 The people broke camp at the command of the LORD, and at his command they set up camp. As long as the cloud stayed over the Tent, they stayed in the same camp.

Num 9:19 When the cloud stayed over the Tent for a long time, they obeyed the LORD and did not move on.

Num 9:20 Sometimes the cloud remained over the Tent for only a few days; in any case, they remained in camp or moved, according to the command of the LORD.

Num 9:21 Sometimes the cloud remained only from evening until morning, and they moved on as soon as the cloud lifted. Whenever the cloud lifted, they moved on.

Num 9:22 Whether it was two days, a month, a year, or longer, as long as the cloud remained over the Tent, they did not move on; but when it lifted, they moved.

Num 9:23 They set up camp and broke camp in obedience to the commands which the LORD gave through Moses.

Numbers 9:1-23

Numbers 9 - Keeping the Passover; the Cloud by Day and Fire by Night

A. Keeping the Passover.

1. (1-5) *The first Passover in the wilderness.*

Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: "Let the children of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time. On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it at its appointed time. According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it." So Moses told the children of Israel that they should keep the Passover. And they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, at twilight, in the Wilderness of Sinai; according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did.

- a. **Let the children of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time:** Israel celebrated Passover as they were leaving Egypt (Exodus 12). The Passover here marked the one-year point of their journey out of slavery and into the Promised Land.
- b. **According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it:** Passover was meant to be a reminder of God's "passing over" Israel in the judgment of the firstborn at the Exodus from Egypt.

- i. The blood of the lamb, applied to the door posts of the home, would be seen by the angel of God's judgment - and seeing the blood, the angel would "pass over" and spare the home covered by the blood. Passover was meant to be a continual reminder of this occasion of being spared judgment, and of the deliverance that followed in the Exodus.
- ii. Jesus fulfilled the Passover sacrifice by His death on the cross (1Co 5:7); the covering of His blood causes the judgment of God to "pass over" us. We are commanded to continually remember our occasion of being spared judgment and the deliverance that followed, by remembering Jesus' work on the cross through the Lord's Supper.

2. (6-14) *The case of the unclean men: Should they keep Passover?*

Now there were certain men who were defiled by a human corpse, so that they could not keep the Passover on that day; and they came before Moses and Aaron that day. And those men said to him, "We became defiled by a human corpse. Why are we kept from presenting the offering of the LORD at its appointed time among the children of Israel?" And Moses said to them, "Stand still, that I may hear what the LORD will command concerning you." Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If anyone of you or your posterity is unclean because of a corpse, or is far away on a journey, he may still keep the LORD's Passover. On the fourteenth day of the second month, at twilight, they may keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break one of its bones. According to all the ordinances of the Passover they shall keep

it. But the man who is clean and is not on a journey, and ceases to keep the Passover, that same person shall be cut off from among his people, because he did not bring the offering of the LORD at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin. And if a stranger dwells among you, and would keep the LORD's Passover, he must do so according to the rite of the Passover and according to its ceremony; you shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger and the native of the land."

a. **There were certain men who were defiled by a human corpse, so that they could not keep the Passover:** In response to this matter, it was determined that the unclean must not neglect to keep Passover. Since Passover was a reminder and identification with spared judgment and deliverance, it must always be remembered. However, the unclean had to wait one month and keep Passover **on the fourteenth day of the second month.**

i. These were probably not the only two in Israel who had defiled themselves on the Passover. Perhaps others who became unclean did not come forward because they saw it as an excuse to not partake. They could have a day off without any obligation to God. But these two *wanted* to partake of Passover and are bold enough to ask Moses (and to ask God through Moses) for an exception to the previous command (as Lev 7:20; Lev 22:3).

ii. Thus, provision was made for the unclean to remember God's spared judgment and deliverance - and the unclean needed most to remember it.

b. **But the man who is clean and is not on a journey:** However, those among Israel who were clean and not traveling *must* keep Passover or be **cut off from**

among his people. The punishment for not keeping Passover was severe: **That man shall bear his sin**, instead of having it borne by the Passover lamb.

i. In the same pattern, we *must* partake of Jesus, or bear our own sin. *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you... He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.* (Joh 6:53; Joh 6:56)

c. **And if a stranger dwells among you:** Additionally, it didn't matter what bloodline or ethnic group the person came from: Even the **stranger** could and must partake of Passover, or be cut off. A Jew with the purest bloodlines would be cut off if they neglected Passover; the most mongrel gentile would be accepted if they participated in God's Passover.

d. **He must do so according to the rite of the Passover and according to its ceremony:** Before Israel could enter into the Promised Land, they must remember what got them there. It was the sparing of God's judgment, and His glorious, miraculous deliverance. Promised land people must always live in remembrance of God's deliverance, and it all flows from the work of Jesus on the cross.

B. The cloud and the fire guide Israel.

1. (15) *The presence of God with Israel is displayed by the cloud and fire.*

Now on the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the Testimony; from evening until morning it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire.

a. **Now on the day that the tabernacle was raised up:** When the tabernacle was originally built (**raised**

up), God blessed it by showing His presence in the form of the cloud by day and the fire by night (Exo 40:34-38).

b. **The cloud covered the tabernacle:** This cloud of God's *Shekinah* glory was evident at different times in Israel's history; when Solomon built the temple, the cloud of glory filled the temple (1Ki 8:10-11); but when Israel apostatized, and before the temple was destroyed by conquering Babylonians, the cloud of glory departed (Eze 10:3-4; Eze 10:18-19).

i. Which would be worse - to have never seen such an amazing visual emblem of God's presence and glory, or to have seen it - and then watch it depart? This is why God so sparingly appeals to our physical senses with the emblems of His glory; we will be (perhaps rightly) devastated when the emblem is gone.

ii. In 1992, some prophets within the Vineyard movement claimed to have discovered a sensory evidence of God's presence: They said they learned God smells like roses or honeysuckle. They also said that sin smells like sulfur.

c. **From evening until morning it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire:** Additionally, this was more than proof of God's presence. The cloud by day and the fire by night were actual helps and comforts to Israel. The fire at night was obviously a comfort to Israel in the midst of a dark wilderness, and the cloud by day would be a shade from the hot wilderness sun.

i. *For You have been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat (Isa 25:4) The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day*

(Psa 121:5). In the LORD, we genuinely have it “made in the shade”!

2. (16-23) *Guidance by the cloud by day and the fire by night.*

So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents. At the command of the LORD the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of the LORD they would camp; as long as the cloud stayed above the tabernacle they remained encamped. Even when the cloud continued long, many days above the tabernacle, the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD and did not journey. So it was, when the cloud was above the tabernacle a few days: according to the command of the LORD they would remain encamped, and according to the command of the LORD they would journey. So it was, when the cloud remained only from evening until morning: when the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they would journey; whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud was taken up, they would journey. Whether it was two days, a month, or a year that the cloud remained above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would remain encamped and not journey; but when it was taken up, they would journey. At the command of the LORD they remained encamped, and at the command of the LORD they journeyed; they kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

a. **So it was always:** Though Israel had been organized and ordered by God; though they had been cleansed,

and set apart, and blessed, and giving, and walking in their priesthood, they still had to be guided by God each step of the way to make it to the Promised Land. God had not done all those previous things to make them able to start towards the Promised Land on their own, but to make every step in constant dependence on Him.

b. **Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey:** So, when the cloud moved, Israel moved; when the cloud stayed, Israel stayed. They only went where the presence of God led them, and they only stayed where the presence of God stayed.

i. Believers today must, in the same way, be led by the presence of God; when Paul says

let the peace of God rule in your hearts (Col 3:15)
he means the presence of God's peace is to be an umpire or a judge in our hearts.

The Silver Trumpets

Num 10:1 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 10:2 "Make two trumpets of hammered silver to use for calling the people together and for breaking camp.

Num 10:3 When long blasts are sounded on both trumpets, the whole community is to gather around you at the entrance to the Tent of my presence.

Num 10:4 But when only one trumpet is sounded, then only the leaders of the clans are to gather around you.

Num 10:5 When short blasts are sounded, the tribes camped on the east will move out.

Num 10:6 When short blasts are sounded a second time, the tribes on the south will move out. So short blasts are to be sounded to break camp,

Num 10:7 but in order to call the community together, long blasts are to be sounded.

Num 10:8 The trumpets are to be blown by Aaron's sons, the priests. "The following rule is to be observed for all time to come.

Num 10:9 When you are at war in your land, defending yourselves against an enemy who has attacked you, sound the signal for battle on these trumpets. I, the LORD your God, will help you and save you from your enemies.

Num 10:10 Also on joyful occasions—at your New Moon Festivals and your other religious festivals—you are to blow the trumpets when you present your burnt offerings and your fellowship offerings. Then I will help you. I am the LORD your God."

Israel Leaves Sinai

Num 10:11 On the twentieth day of the second month in the second year after the people left Egypt, the cloud over the Tent of the LORD's presence lifted,

Num 10:12 and the Israelites started on their journey out of the Sinai Desert. The cloud came to rest in the wilderness of Paran.

Num 10:13 They began to march at the command of the LORD through Moses,

Num 10:14 and each time they moved, they were in the same order. Those under the banner of the division led by the tribe of Judah started out first, company by company, with Nahshon son of Amminadab in command.

Num 10:15 Nethanel son of Zuar was in command of the tribe of Issachar,

Num 10:16 and Eliab son of Helon was in command of the tribe of Zebulun.

Num 10:17 Then the Tent would be taken down, and the clans of Gershon and Merari, who carried it, would start out.

Num 10:18 Next, those under the banner of the division led by the tribe of Reuben would start out, company by company, with Elizur son of Shedeur in command.

Num 10:19 Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai was in command of the tribe of Simeon,

Num 10:20 and Eliasaph son of Deuel was in command of the tribe of Gad.

Num 10:21 Then the Levite clan of Kohath would start out, carrying the sacred objects. By the time they arrived at the next camp, the Tent had been set up again.

Num 10:22 Next, those under the banner of the division led by the tribe of Ephraim would start out, company by company, with Elishama son of Ammihud in command.

Num 10:23 Gamaliel son of Pedahzur was in command of the tribe of Manasseh,

Num 10:24 and Abidan son of Gideoni was in command of the tribe of Benjamin.

Num 10:25 Finally, those under the banner of the division led by the tribe of Dan, serving as the rear guard of all the divisions, would start out, company by company, with Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai in command.

Num 10:26 Pagièl son of Ochran was in command of the tribe of Asher,

Num 10:27 and Ahira son of Enan was in command of the tribe of Naphtali.

Num 10:28 This, then, was the order of march, company by company, whenever the Israelites broke camp and set out.

Num 10:29 Moses said to his brother-in-law Hobab son of Jethro the Midianite, "We are about to start out for the place which the LORD said he would give us. He has promised to make Israel prosperous, so come with us, and we will share our prosperity with you."

Num 10:30 Hobab answered, "No, I am going back to my native land."

Num 10:31 "Please don't leave us," Moses said. "You know where we can camp in the wilderness, and you can be our guide.

Num 10:32 If you come with us, we will share with you all the blessings that the LORD gives us."

Num 10:33 When the people left Sinai, the holy mountain, they traveled three days. The LORD's Covenant Box always went ahead of them to find a place for them to camp.

Num 10:34 As they moved on from each camp, the cloud of the LORD was over them by day.

Num 10:35 Whenever the Covenant Box started out, Moses would say, "Arise, LORD; scatter your enemies and put to flight those who hate you!"

Num 10:36 And whenever it stopped, he would say, "Return, LORD, to the thousands of families of Israel."

Numbers 10:1-36

Numbers 10 - Two Silver Trumpets, the Departure from the Sinai

A. Two silver trumpets.

1. (1-2) Two silver trumpets.

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Make two silver trumpets for yourself; you shall make them of hammered work; you shall use them for calling the congregation and for directing the movement of the camps."

a. **Make two silver trumpets:** The two silver trumpets were for use in directing the movement of the camps for marching and for battle, and also for gathering the nation together for an assembly.

b. You shall use them for calling the congregation and for directing the movement of the camps: The trumpets were essential *tools* for the journey to the Promised Land. Without them it would be very difficult to assemble the nation and march towards the Promised Land. Israel needed *tools* to come into the Promised Land.

2. (3-10) The system of blowing trumpets.

"When they blow both of them, all the congregation shall gather before you at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. But if they blow *only* one, then the leaders, the heads of the divisions of Israel, shall gather to you. When you sound the advance, the camps that lie on the east side shall then begin their journey. When you sound the advance the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall begin their journey; they shall sound the call for them to begin their journeys. And when the assembly is to be gathered together, you shall blow, but not sound the advance. The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets; and these shall be to you as an ordinance forever throughout your generations. When you go to war in your land against the enemy who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you will be remembered before the LORD your God, and you will be saved from your enemies. Also in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be a memorial for you before your God: I am the LORD your God."

a. When they blow both of them, all the congregation shall gather: Distinctive sounds were

made to indicate gathering for assembly, marching, or warfare. God also promised to hear the trumpet of Israel in warfare, and to act on behalf of the nation.

- i. "If we follow Jewish tradition, long blasts were used to assemble the people to Moses, to the tent of meeting and for worship. Short staccato blasts were used in battle and to order the camps to move off." (Wenham)
- b. **Also in the day of your gladness:** Trumpets were also to be sounded **in the day of your gladness**; they were a way of celebrating God's people coming together and the presence of the LORD with them.
 - i. God will use the sound of a trumpet to gather His people for the ultimate assembling together - the rapture of the church, to meet the Lord in the air (1Th 4:16-18).

B. Departure for the Promised Land.

1. (11-13) The march on Canaan begins.

Now it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle of the Testimony. And the children of Israel set out from the Wilderness of Sinai on their journeys; then the cloud settled down in the Wilderness of Paran. So they started out for the first time according to the command of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

- a. **And the children of Israel set out from the Wilderness of Sinai on their journeys:** As the cloud began to move, one might imagine the huge sense of excitement that flowed through the people - now they were on their way to the Promised Land! Previously, their journey had been *from* Egypt and slavery; now it was *to* Canaan and liberty.

b. So they started out for the first time according to the command of the LORD by the hand of Moses:

This was the **first time** Israel marched as an organized, prepared *nation*. They were not the same group that escaped Egypt as a mob.

i. They had been fully prepared to walk as Promised Land people and it was all focused towards this exact point: bringing them into the Promised Land:

- They were ordered and organized.
- They were cleansed and purified.
- They were set apart and blessed.
- They were taught how to give and how to function as priests.
- They were made to remember judgment spared and deliverance brought.
- They were given God's presence as a guide and the tools needed to lead the people.

ii. One would be tempted to think that after such extensive preparation - a virtual transformation from slave people to Promised Land people - the actual entering into the Promised Land would be easy. This was not the case. The preparation was exactly that - preparation. Ahead of them are the greatest challenges, challenges that can only be met by faith. A soldier might think boot camp finishes something - but it doesn't. It only prepares for a greater challenge: The actual battle itself.

2. (14-28) Description of the order of march.

The standard of the camp of the children of Judah set out first according to their armies; over their army was Nahshon the son of Amminadab. Over the army of the tribe of the children of Issachar was Nethanel

the son of Zuar. And over the army of the tribe of the children of Zebulun was Eliab the son of Helon. Then the tabernacle was taken down; and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari set out, carrying the tabernacle. And the standard of the camp of Reuben set out according to their armies; over their army was Elizur the son of Shedeur. Over the army of the tribe of the children of Simeon was Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai. And over the army of the tribe of the children of Gad was Eliasaph the son of Deuel. Then the Kohathites set out, carrying the holy things. (The tabernacle would be prepared for their arrival.) And the standard of the camp of the children of Ephraim set out according to their armies; over their army was Elishama the son of Ammihud. Over the army of the tribe of the children of Manasseh was Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. And over the army of the tribe of the children of Benjamin was Abidan the son of Gideoni. Then the standard of the camp of the children of Dan (the rear guard of all the camps) set out according to their armies; over their army was Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai. Over the army of the tribe of the children of Asher was Pagi the son of Ocran. And over the army of the tribe of the children of Naphtali was Ahira the son of Enan. Thus was the order of march of the children of Israel, according to their armies, when they began their journey.

- a. **The standard of the camp of the children of Judah set out first:** They actually marched in the order God had commanded earlier in the book. This means that they took God's word seriously and followed it exactly - just as Promised Land people should.
- b. **When they began their journey:** This was only the beginning. It would have been easy to see all they went

through to get to Sinai, and the preparations as the end, but they were only the beginning.

3. (29-32) *Moses appeals to his brother in law to stay with Israel.*

Now Moses said to Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place of which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us, and we will treat you well; for the LORD has promised good things to Israel." And he said to him, "I will not go, but I will depart to my own land and to my relatives." So Moses said, "Please do not leave, inasmuch as you know how we are to camp in the wilderness, and you can be our eyes. And it shall be, if you go with us; indeed it shall be; that whatever good the LORD will do to us, the same we will do to you."

a. **Come with us, and we will treat you well:** Moses was a wise enough leader to know his limitations, and to know that he needed help. Instead of just saying, "well, God got us this far and He'll see us through without Reuel" he knew God's help often comes through men like Reuel.

i. Though Israel was guided by God, there was still help needed by man - men like Reuel. God plans it this way, often arranging it so His help comes to us partially through people He has ordained to help us.

b. **Please do not leave:** Since he knew God could use Reuel in a significant way, Moses was willing to appeal to him - and not take an initial "no" as an answer.

4. (33-36) ***Rise up, O LORD!***

So they departed from the mountain of the LORD on a journey of three days; and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them for the three days'

journey, to search out a resting place for them. And the cloud of the LORD was above them by day when they went out from the camp. So it was, whenever the ark set out, that Moses said:

**"Rise up, O LORD!
Let Your enemies be scattered,
And let those who hate You flee before You."**

And when it rested, he said:

**"Return, O LORD,
To the many thousands of Israel."**

a. **And the cloud of the LORD was above them by day when they went out from the camp:** As they begin the journey to the Promised Land, they were guided by God's presence - and not by themselves. They followed the cloud no matter where God led them. If they were to camp in a rough place, they did it. If they were told to go on from a comfortable place, they did it. They allowed themselves to be guided by God, not by their own desire for comfort and ease.

b. **Rise up, O LORD! Let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You:** This was the prayer of Moses when the presence of God led them on.

i. The idea was simple: "God, go before us and take care of our enemies. It's too dangerous ahead unless You do so!" What a fitting prayer for every believer to pray! God has things before us, places to lead us - shouldn't we pray this same prayer?

ii. Isn't this a fitting prayer also by which to remember the glory and strength of our resurrected Lord? When Jesus rose up, were not all His enemies scattered? Who dared oppose Him? Is not all our victory found in His risen glory?

C.

Return, O LORD, to the many thousands of Israel:

This was the prayer of Moses when God's presence stopped and indicated a place to camp. Moses then prayed, "Here we camp, LORD. Stay with us."

- i. God sometimes tells us to move on, sometimes tells us to "camp out" - either is fine when we are guided by His presence.
- ii. "Will you and I go home and pray this prayer by ourselves, fervently laying hold upon the horns of God's altar? I charge you, my brethren in Christ, do not neglect this private duty. Go, each of you, to your chambers; shut to your doors; cry to him who hears in secret, and let this be the burden of your cry - 'Rise up, Lord; and let thine enemies be scattered.'" (Spurgeon)

The People Complain

Num 11:1 The people began to complain to the LORD about their troubles. When the LORD heard them, he became angry and sent fire on the people. It burned among them and destroyed one end of the camp.

Num 11:2 The people cried out to Moses for help; he prayed to the LORD, and the fire died down.

Num 11:3 So the place was named Taberah, because there the fire of the LORD burned among them.

Num 11:4 There were foreigners traveling with the Israelites. They had a strong craving for meat, and even the Israelites themselves began to complain: "If only we could have some meat!"

Num 11:5 In Egypt we used to eat all the fish we wanted, and it cost us nothing. Remember the cucumbers, the watermelons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic we had?

Num 11:6 But now our strength is gone. There is nothing at all to eat—nothing but this manna day after day!"

Num 11:7 (Manna was like small seeds, whitish yellow in color.

Num 11:8 (8-9) It fell on the camp at night along with the dew. The next morning the people would go around and gather it, grind it or pound it into flour, and then boil it and make it into flat cakes. It tasted like bread baked with olive oil.)

Num 11:10 Moses heard all the people complaining as they stood around in groups at the entrances of their tents. He was distressed because the LORD had become angry with them,

Num 11:11 and he said to the LORD, "Why have you treated me so badly? Why are you displeased with me? Why have you given me the responsibility for all these people?

Num 11:12 I didn't create them or bring them to birth! Why should you ask me to act like a nurse and carry them in my arms like babies all the way to the land you promised to their ancestors?

Num 11:13 Where could I get enough meat for all these people? They keep whining and asking for meat.

Num 11:14 I can't be responsible for all these people by myself; it's too much for me!

Num 11:15 If you are going to treat me like this, have pity on me and kill me, so that I won't have to endure your cruelty any longer."

Elders Appointed to Aid Moses

Num 11:16 The LORD said to Moses, "Assemble seventy respected men who are recognized as leaders of the people, bring them to me at the Tent of my presence, and tell them to stand there beside you.

Num 11:17 I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the spirit I have given you and give it to them. Then they can help you bear the responsibility for these people, and you will not have to bear it alone.

Num 11:18 Now tell the people, 'Purify yourselves for tomorrow; you will have meat to eat. The LORD has heard you whining and saying that you wished you had some meat and that you were better off in Egypt. Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will have to eat it.'

Num 11:19 You will have to eat it not just for one or two days, or five, or ten, or even twenty days,

Num 11:20 but for a whole month, until it comes out of your ears, until you are sick of it. This will happen because you have rejected the LORD who is here among you and have complained to him that you should never have left Egypt.' "

Num 11:21 Moses said to the LORD, "Here I am leading 600,000 people, and you say that you will give them enough meat for a month?

Num 11:22 Could enough cattle and sheep be killed to satisfy them? Are all the fish in the sea enough for them?"

Num 11:23 "Is there a limit to my power?" the LORD answered. "You will soon see whether what I have said will happen or not!"

Num 11:24 So Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said. He assembled seventy of the leaders and placed them around the Tent.

Num 11:25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him. He took some of the spirit he had given to Moses and gave it to the seventy leaders. When the spirit came on them, they began to shout like prophets, but not for long.

Num 11:26 Two of the seventy leaders, Eldad and Medad, had stayed in the camp and had not gone out to the Tent.

There in the camp the spirit came on them, and they too began to shout like prophets.

Num 11:27 A young man ran out to tell Moses what Eldad and Medad were doing.

Num 11:28 Then Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' helper since he was a young man, spoke up and said to Moses, "Stop them, sir!"

Num 11:29 Moses answered, "Are you concerned about my interests? I wish that the LORD would give his spirit to all his people and make all of them shout like prophets!"

Num 11:30 Then Moses and the seventy leaders of Israel went back to camp.

Quail and a Plague

Num 11:31 Suddenly the LORD sent a wind that brought quails from the sea, flying three feet above the ground. They settled on the camp and all around it for miles and miles in every direction.

Num 11:32 So all that day, all night, and all the next day, the people worked catching quails; no one gathered less than fifty bushels. They spread them out to dry all around the camp.

Num 11:33 While there was still plenty of meat for them to eat, the LORD became angry with the people and caused an epidemic to break out among them.

Num 11:34 That place was named Kibroth Hattaavah (which means "Graves of Craving"), because there they buried the people who had craved meat.

Num 11:35 From there the people moved to Hazeroth, where they made camp.

Numbers 11:1-35

Numbers 11 - The People Complain

A. The complaints of Israel and of Moses.

1. (1-3) The complaining heart of Israel.

Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp. Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the LORD, the fire was quenched. So he called the name of the place Taberah, because the fire of the LORD had burned among them.

a. **Now when the people complained:** Israel, having been ordered, organized, cleansed, separated, blessed, taught how to give, reminded of God's deliverance, given God's presence, and the tools to advance to the Promised Land, is now on the march to Canaan - and immediately, **the people complained**.

i. How can it be that a nation so blessed can still complain? God had done so much in and for Israel; yet they still murmur against Him. Of course, their circumstances were not easy - but what sin it is for them to complain against God, wiping out the spirit of gratitude in their hearts!

b. **The people complained... it displeased the LORD:** This was a simple case of cause-and-effect. Our complaining hearts displease God, because it shows so little gratitude for what He has done in the past, and faith for what He can do right now.

i. We aren't even told here exactly what Israel was complaining about. Perhaps here, it is because their complaining is just that generally dissatisfied heart - complaining not for any one great reason, but because that is where their hearts are.

c. **The fire of the LORD burned among them:** Israel had valued the fire of God as the emblem of His presence

at night; but now, that fire and the presence of God becomes somewhat of a two-edged sword - the presence of God was there to deal with sin as well as to comfort Israel.

d. **The people cried out to Moses:** Ideally, they would have cried out to God Himself; but with their low walk with God, they feel more comfortable with Moses.

e. **When Moses prayed to the LORD, the fire was quenched:** Moses intercedes for the people, and the fire is quenched - but the place is named **Taberah** ("burning") as a reminder of God's estimation of the complaining heart.

2. (4-9) *Israel complains about manna.*

Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat? "We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!" Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its color like the color of bdellium. The people went about and gathered it, ground it on millstones or beat it in the mortar, cooked it in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil. And when the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it.

a. **Now the mixed multitude who were among them:** Exo 12:38 says that a *mixed multitude* went out of Egypt. This means that not all of those who came out of Egypt with Moses were ethnically Israelites; many Egyptians (and perhaps other foreigners) went with them, because they were fellow slaves in Egypt, and

because the God of Israel has shown Himself more powerful than the gods of the Egyptians.

- i. There is a sense also in which Israel was a **mixed multitude** spiritually - not all had a genuine, real relationship with God. This is true of the visible church as well, which Jesus said would contain good and bad until the final harvest (Mat 13:24-30; Mat 13:36-43).
- b. **Yielded to intense craving:** The Hebrew word here is *ta'avah*; it is also used in passages like Gen 3:6, 1Sa 2:16, Job 33:20, Psa 10:3 for the strong desire for something pleasant, but perhaps sinful (though not always).
 - i. Israel had to *yield* to this intense craving; it would not be fulfilled unless they cooperated with it. Jas 1:14 says *but each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed*; the attraction to sin is present within us, yet we must still *yield* to it in choosing to sin.
- c. **Who will give us meat to eat:** This was a strange question to ask, considering they had a God in heaven that met their every need. It seems that Israel looked for *another* provider because they are not satisfied with what comes to them from the hand of God - and are so distraught over this they *wept!*
 - i. Tears of repentance or sorrow over sin or joy in the LORD can be beautiful before God; but many tears shed, even by believers, are shed over childish disappointments.
 - ii. Israel *could* have provided meat for themselves. God did not prohibit them to hunt whatever animals they could in the wilderness; and they had their flocks, which could be slaughtered for meat. They

don't want to do anything about their desire for meat, except cry about it.

d. **We remember:** In describing life in Egypt, one would think their slavery there was heaven on earth for Israel! One would think that their plates were always crammed with wonderful foods. Israel here is engaging in "creative memory," choosing to remember certain things about Egypt, and exaggerating those things, while at the same time choosing to forget other things.

i. We often think of our memory as a mechanical "photographing" process, which impartially records the facts and then impartially retrieves those records. It isn't like that at all! Memory, both in recording and retrieving, is a creative process - and "memories" can be created of events that never happened. This is much to the pain of families that have been wounded by "False Memory Syndrome," where childhood memories of abuse and such are created.

ii. Memory often romanticizes the past; one may long for a return to the spiritual environment of one's youth, when everyone seemed more right with God and more on fire. Yet, this is often confused with a simple longing for our youth - when things seemed so much simpler, our responsibilities were fewer, and everything was newer.

iii. Israel fell in love with an illusion from the past (how great Egypt was), instead of looking for what God had for them in the future - the Promised Land, which was truly a land of milk and honey - all the great food they could ever want! God's best for us is always ahead, never behind us.

e. **Nothing at all except this manna:** Essentially, their complaint against the manna was, "It's not exciting enough. It's boring." This appalling lack of gratitude was

nothing less than to have despised the LORD (Num 11:20). God is our provider; to despise what He provides is to despise Him. It is not God's job to entertain us, and we should be more than children who demand to be entertained and excited.

f. **Now our whole being is dried up:** The complaining heart romanticizes the past, but it also exaggerates the problems of the present. **Our whole being is dried up** was a gross exaggeration. God would not allow them away in the wilderness. In fact, God provided their every need - though not every desire.

g. **Its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil:** In fact, manna was excellent provision. Seemingly, it could taste like donuts, yet provided all necessary nutrition for a long journey through the wilderness.

i. "They could never be satisfied; even God himself could not please them, because they were ever preferring their own wisdom to his. God will save us in his own way, or not at all; because that way, being the plan of infinite wisdom, it is impossible that we can be saved in any other." (Clarke)

3. (10-15) *The complaint of Moses.*

Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the LORD was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased. So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,' to the land which You swore to their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all

these people? For they weep all over me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me. If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now; if I have found favor in Your sight; and do not let me see my wretchedness!"

a. And the anger of the LORD was greatly aroused;

Moses also was displeased: The childish weeping of the people not only angered the LORD; it displeased Moses as well. This frustration drove him in frustration to God.

i. Moses certainly had a *better* reason to complain to God; it wasn't as if he **yielded to intense craving** as the children of Israel did. Yet, even his complaining is not good, and shows a lapse in his trust in God.

ii. Moses seems caught off-guard; surprised that the people would be so rebellious so quickly after such a strong warning at Taberah; leaders are apt to do the wrong thing when they are caught off-guard!

b. Why have You afflicted Your servant: Moses responded to God the way many of us do in a time of trial. He essentially said, "God, here I am serving You. Why did You bring this upon me?" It's easy to say God did not bring this upon Moses - a carnal and ungrateful people did. Yet, though God did not directly afflict Moses with this, He ultimately allowed it.

i. God allowed this for the same reason God allows any affliction in our lives - to compel us to trust in Him all the more, to partner with Him in overcoming obstacles, and to love and praise Him all the more through our increased dependence on Him and the greater deliverance He brings.

ii. *That no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this* (1Th 3:3).

iii. Of course, it is very hard to see this in the midst of the affliction; we feel like Moses did:

Why have I not found favor in Your sight? "If You really loved me LORD, why would You bring all this upon me?" God's response is ever the same: "It's because I do love you that I am training you, building you up in faith."

c. **Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them:** When Moses likened himself to a mother and the children of Israel as his children, he used a fitting figure of speech - because Israel was in fact acting like a bunch of babies. When Moses said, "**For they weep all over me**" it showed that Israel cried childish tears from a temper-tantrum.

d. **I am not able to bear all these people alone:** Now Moses has a correct understanding, though not a correct attitude yet. He cannot bear all these people alone; God will do it in him and through him.

e. **If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now:** Moses was extremely frustrated. He poured out an emotional, pained, fed-up, "I'm sick and tired of this" heart to the LORD. "If You really love me LORD, kill me right now" is not a correct prayer from the head, but it is a honest prayer from the heart.

i. God will not answer Moses' request; but He will answer the prayer of his heart. When we are overwhelmed with such feelings, it is good for us to take them to the LORD, and let go of them, rather than brooding on them ourselves.

ii. **And do not let me see my wretchedness:** This was a prayer God would not answer. God wanted Moses to see his wretchedness - his inability to fix this problem - apart from the mighty hand of God. When Moses sees his wretchedness - his weakness, then he can be strong in God's strength. As Paul learned: God's strength is made perfect in weakness (2Co 12:9).

B. God answers the complaints of Israel and of Moses.

1. (16-17) *God helps Moses by sending elders to assist him.*

So the LORD said to Moses: "Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that *is* upon you and will put *the same* upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear *it* yourself alone."

a. **Whom you know to be the elders of the people:** Moses was not to pick men whom he thought might *become* elders; he was to pick men who were already known as elders because of their wisdom, conduct, and ministry to others. Elders are made by God but recognized by men.

b. **That they may stand there with you:** The first call of the elders was simply to be there with Moses, before the LORD. They were a support and strength to Moses just by their presence.

c. **I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them:** The elders must have the same heart, the same vision, and same Spirit that was

on Moses. If not, there would be no agreement among the leadership of the nation and disaster could result.

d. **They shall bear the burden of the people with you:** The elders were there to help Moses carry the spiritual load - to help him care for and minister to the people, and to be a support for him in the ministry. God's help was going to come to Moses through the support of godly men. This is a customary way for God to meet our needs.

2. (18-20) *God promises to provide meat for Israel.*

"Then you shall say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, "Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt." Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the LORD who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?"'"'

a. **Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat:** This was not a blessing. God promised to answer the desire of Israel's heart; but not in a way that would be a blessing to Israel. Sometimes the LORD chastises us by giving us what we ask for - what our *intense craving* cries out for.

b. **Until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you:** God promised to give them so much meat they would become sickened by it. This was because they denied and doubted the goodness of God's deliverance.

i. It is dangerous for a Christian to entertain the thought, "I wish I had never decided to follow Jesus. I had it better in the world." Such thoughts, if they come, must be put away immediately. We can never deny or doubt the goodness of God's deliverance.

3. (21-23) Moses reacts to God's promise to provide meat for Israel.

And Moses said, "The people whom I am among are six hundred thousand men on foot; yet You have said, 'I will give them meat, that they may eat for a whole month.' Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to provide enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to provide enough for them?" And the LORD said to Moses, "Has the LORD's arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not."

a. **The people whom I am among are six hundred thousand men on foot:** Moses reacted as we often do - trying to figure out how God would perform a particular promise. Moses couldn't figure it out; but God never asked him to. God will provide, because His arm has not been shortened, nor has He lost any strength.

b. **Has the LORD's arm been shortened:** God had not suddenly become weak or limited. God has resources that Moses knew nothing about. We might say that God likes to meet our needs in completely unexpected ways.

4. (24-30) The Spirit comes upon the seventy elders.

So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD, and he gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tabernacle. Then the LORD came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy

elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again. But two men had remained in the camp: the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them. Now they were among those listed, but who had not gone out to the tabernacle; yet they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, one of his choice men, answered and said, "Moses my lord, forbid them!" Then Moses said to him, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!" And Moses returned to the camp, both he and the elders of Israel.

a. He gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tabernacle:

Before God provided the meat for Israel (which they asked for, but *didn't* really need), He first provided them more leadership and oversight (which they didn't ask for, but really *did* need).

b. And took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders: For this expanded leadership to do the job, they needed to have an outpouring of the Holy Spirit - and they needed to have the same spirit that was on Moses. They needed to have his vision, his heart, and his attitude.

i. If a man does not have the Holy Spirit flowing in power in his life, and the same spirit as those the LORD has put in authority over him, he is unequipped to serve as he should - and will end up being a hindrance, not a blessing.

c. **Yet they prophesied in the camp:** The operation of the Holy Spirit was not limited to a particular geography. Even these two men who were not with the rest of the seventy elders were filled with the Holy Spirit.

i. Joshua, when he learned of this, functioned as a good assistant should: His first concern was for Moses' ministry and feared that this might in some way undermine it. Would Eldad and Medad become rivals to Moses? Not if Joshua had anything to say about it!

ii. But Moses knew these men, and understood they had no divisive heart - and longs for everyone in Israel to have the same filling of the Holy Spirit. Moses is never afraid of a genuinely Spirit-filled man being a rival or a divisive person!

5. (31-35) *God helps Israel by providing meat for them.*

Now a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought quail from the sea and left *them* fluttering near the camp, about a day's journey on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground. And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and they spread *them* out for themselves all around the camp. But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague. So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving. From Kibroth Hattaavah the people moved to Hazeroth, and camped at Hazeroth.

a. **Now a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought quail:** Miraculously, God directed a huge

number of quail to the camp of Israel, where they were killed and could be eaten. Quail make a migration over the Sinai wilderness every year; it has been recorded that Arabs living near this region could catch between one and two million quails during their autumn migration, using nets.

- i. The quail came **all around the camp** - that is, on the perimeter. When the Holy Spirit was poured out, it drew men into the center of the camp - right into the middle of the people of God. To get the quail, they had to go outside of the camp - away from the people of God. God's best for us is always toward the center of the camp, not on the outside.
- b. **While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people:** The people, with great effort and excitement, gathered the quail and prepared it for eating. But when they ate - **while the meat was still between their teeth**, the LORD sent a plague among them and many died.
 - i. *He also rained meat on them like the dust, feathered fowl like the sand of the seas; and He let them fall in the midst of their camp, all around their dwellings. So they ate and were well filled, for He gave them their own desire. They were not deprived of their craving; but while their food was still in their mouths, the wrath of God came against them, and slew the stoutest of them, and struck down the choice men of Israel. (Psa 78:27-31)*
 - ii. *They soon forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tested God in the desert. And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul. (Psa 106:13-15)*

iii. When we allow ungodly cravings to rule our lives, God may send what we crave - and *leanness* into our soul as well. Better to have a "fat" soul and be deprived those cravings!

iv. This was a strict judgment, but it was a *help* to Israel because it taught them to not be ruled by their craving, then it was a huge help to the nation. Promised land people must be ruled by more than their physical or emotional appetites.

c. **So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah:** They named the place **Kibroth Hattaavah** - which means "Graves of Craving." How many have had their cravings be their grave? How many have lived in spiritual death because they yielded to their cravings, and never found victory over their lusts?

Miriam and Aaron Oppose Moses

Num 12:1 Moses had married a Cushite woman, and Miriam and Aaron criticized him for it.

Num 12:2 They said, "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses? Hasn't he also spoken through us?" The LORD heard what they said.

Num 12:3 (Moses was a humble man, more humble than anyone else on earth.)

Num 12:4 Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "I want the three of you to come out to the Tent of my presence." They went,

Num 12:5 and the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, stood at the entrance of the Tent, and called out, "Aaron! Miriam!" The two of them stepped forward,

Num 12:6 and the LORD said, "Now hear what I have to say! When there are prophets among you, I reveal myself to them in visions and speak to them in dreams.

Num 12:7 It is different when I speak with my servant Moses; I have put him in charge of all my people Israel.

Num 12:8 So I speak to him face-to-face, clearly and not in riddles; he has even seen my form! How dare you speak against my servant Moses?"

Num 12:9 The LORD was angry with them; and so as he departed

Num 12:10 and the cloud left the Tent, Miriam's skin was suddenly covered with a dreaded disease and turned as white as snow. When Aaron looked at her and saw that she was covered with the disease,

Num 12:11 he said to Moses, "Please, sir, do not make us suffer this punishment for our foolish sin."

Num 12:12 Don't let her become like something born dead with half its flesh eaten away."

Num 12:13 So Moses cried out to the LORD, "O God, heal her!"

Num 12:14 The LORD answered, "If her father had spit in her face, she would have to bear her disgrace for seven days. So let her be shut out of the camp for a week, and after that she can be brought back in."

Num 12:15 Miriam was shut out of the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on until she was brought back in.

Num 12:16 Then they left Hazeroth and set up camp in the wilderness of Paran.

Numbers 12:1-16

Numbers 12 - The Dissension of Aaron and Miriam

A. Miriam and Aaron bring an accusation against Moses.

1. (1) Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses' wife and marriage.

Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman.

a. **Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses:** On the one hand, it seems strange that his sister and brother - his own family - would be the source of such criticism. We might think that they would be Moses' greatest support. Yet it is not unusual for a prophet to be without honor among his own people (Mat 13:57).

i. Miriam takes the lead here; "The feminine singular verb that initiates the chapter (lit., 'and she spoke,' v.1) and the placement of her name before that of Aaron indicate that Miriam is the principal in the attack against Moses." (Allen)

b. **Because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married:** This was the reason for their criticism. This is a problem passage for some, because Exo 3:16-22 indicates Moses' wife (named Zipporah) was the daughter of a man from Midian.

i. Some think perhaps Zipporah had died, and this was a second wife Moses took after her death. Remember that Moses had a remarkably long life and was more than 81 at this time - it is entirely possible he outlived several wives.

ii. Others think Moses took a second wife in addition to Zipporah; this is possible but doesn't seem likely.

iii. Still others suggest that Jethro, Zipporah's father, was actually from Ethiopia and had moved to Midian, making Zipporah an Ethiopian by birth but living in Midian.

iv. It may also be possible that **Ethiopian** here was a derogatory term used to criticize Zipporah because of a dark complexion.

c. **For he had married an Ethiopian woman:**

Interestingly, they criticized Moses and his wife over something she had no control over - her appearance, either because she was an Ethiopian (meaning a Negro) or had a dark complexion as an Ethiopian. Much criticism comes to pastor's wives and others in ministry over things they really have no control over.

- i. However, it seems that the complaint over Moses' wife was not the real issue, which was addressed in the next verse.

2. (2) *A challenge to Moses' spiritual authority.*

**So they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?"
And the LORD heard it.**

a. **Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses:**

This attack attempted to put Moses down, making him seem proud. After all, it should matter nothing to Aaron and Miriam if indeed the LORD had spoken only through Moses. Their real charge was that Moses "goes about acting as if he is the only one the LORD speaks through," accusing Moses of pride.

- i. Did the LORD indeed only speak through Moses? No and yes. Of course, the LORD had spoken through many in the Book of Exodus already: The LORD spoke to the people through Aaron in Exo 4:30; He spoke to Aaron in Exo 12:1; Miriam herself spoke words inspired by God in Exo 15:21. But in the sense of there being one leader for Israel, there was only one. Moses, under God's hand, had the authority and the accountability to lead the people.

b. **Has He not spoken through us also:** This question was meant to lift Miriam and Aaron up. "After all, God speaks to us also. Shouldn't we get some of the credit

around here?" Of course, God *had* spoken to Miriam and Aaron in the past - but He had not given them the authority to lead the nation.

- i. Can God give one man the authority to lead His people? Of course, He can. The Old and New Testaments are filled with this kind of leadership (Moses, Joshua, David, Daniel, James, Peter, Paul, Timothy, Titus; and of course, Jesus, whose leadership style we are commanded to imitate).
- ii. "Every now and then we hear some simpleton or other talking against a 'one-man ministry,' when it has been a one-man ministry from the commencement of the world to the present day; and whenever you try to have any other form of ministry, and doing it thoroughly and heartily and independently and bravely in the sight of God, you very soon run upon quicksands." (Spurgeon, *A Cheery Word in Troublous Times*)

c. **And the LORD heard it:** Of course, God heard it. God always does, and He hears according to truth, not according to mere appearance. Miriam and Aaron - as is often the case - were accusing Moses of the very same sin motivating them to make the accusation (pride).

3. (3) *The humble heart of Moses.*

(Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)

- a. **Now the man Moses was very humble:** Moses had no problem with pride. Quite the contrary - his accusers were the ones with a pride problem.
 - i. If this genuinely humble man Moses was accused of pride and a dictatorial manner, it should show us that the accusation can be made and is made against others who do not deserve it. Just because a man is

accused of pride or arrogance doesn't mean he is guilty of it.

b. **More than all men who were on the face of the earth:** Yet if Moses was so humble, and if Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, we wonder how a humble man could possibly call himself the humblest man **on the face of the earth.** In all likelihood, someone added this comment after the death of Moses - perhaps Joshua, who would have known Moses well.

i. It is important to see Moses didn't start out as the humblest man on earth; he grew up proud and confident in his abilities. It was only time, desert time, lowly time, that made him a humble - and greatly usable - man.

c. **Moses was very humble:** Other commentators suggest that **humble** is better understood as "low" or "miserable," and this describes a low point in Moses' life.

i. "I think the word is not rightly understood; *anav*, which we translate *meek*, comes from *anah*, to *act upon*, to *humble*, *depress*, *afflict*, and is translated so in many places in the Old Testament; and in this sense it should be understood here: 'Now this man Moses was *depressed* or *afflicted* more than any man of that land.'" (Clarke)

B. God answers the accusation of Miriam and Aaron against Moses.

1. (4-5) *God's dramatic appearance to Miriam and Aaron.*

Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" So the three came out. Then the LORD came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward.

- a. **Suddenly:** There was no long delay. Many of God's judgments are long in coming, at least from a human perspective - but on occasion, He does bring His justice suddenly.
- b. **Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting:** God called - seemingly, in an audible voice - for all three to come before the tabernacle of meeting. Perhaps Miriam and Aaron thought that God would use this situation to correct Moses, whom they thought was proud and dictatorial.
- c. **Then the LORD came down in the pillar of cloud:** God took a personal, powerful interest in this important matter. He wanted to make His will plainly known.

2. (6-9) God's vindication of Moses.

Then He said,

"Hear now My words:

**If there is a prophet among you,
I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision;
I speak to him in a dream.
Not so with My servant Moses;
He is faithful in all My house.
I speak with him face to face,
Even plainly, and not in dark sayings;
And he sees the form of the LORD.
Why then were you not afraid
To speak against My servant Moses?"**

**So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them,
and He departed.**

- a. **I speak with him face to face:** The basis of the complaint of Miriam and Aaron was essentially, "What's so special about Moses?" Here, God explained exactly what was so special about him. Most prophets receive

revelation through a dream or in a vision; God spoke with Moses *face to face*.

- i. What did it mean that God spoke with Moses face to face? Didn't the LORD say in Exo 33:20, *You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live?* How then could God speak with Moses *face to face*? **Face to face** is a figure of speech, telling of great and unhindered intimacy; Moses' face was not literally beholding the literal face of God, but he did enjoy direct, intimate, conversation with the LORD.
- ii. This is also demonstrated by the phrase, **and he sees the form of the LORD**. This is what Moses had actually seen of God with his physical eyes - only the "form" of the LORD, nothing specific, because he could not see the LORD and live.
- iii. "The word 'form' is used of visual representations, pictures, or images, of earthly and heavenly beings (Exo 20:4). Job saw someone's form, but could not identify the person from it (Job 4:16)."
(Wenham)

b. **My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings:** Moses enjoyed remarkable communion with God, and it is worth considering why.

- i. Because God *needed* a man this intimate with Him, to be a vessel of revelation and a proper leader for the nation through this remarkable time of the Exodus; this communion was a gift of the sovereign God to Moses.
- ii. Because Moses was a **humble** man; only the humble - those who are genuinely others centered - can be responsible with such communion with God.
- iii. Because Moses, according to God, **is faithful in all My house**: His walk of righteousness and purity,

demonstrated over forty years in obscure service of God in the smallest things, revealed the faithful heart God saw in Moses.

c. Why then were you not afraid to speak against

My servant Moses: As much as Miriam and Aaron did not want to recognize it, Moses *did* have a unique calling and equipping before the LORD. They did not speak against Moses as the President of Israel as much as they spoke against Moses the Servant of God.

i. It was not that Moses was beyond criticism. Moses was not to be simply obeyed and praised, and never confronted or asked the tough questions. In fact, another relative of Moses, his father-in-law Jethro, did confront Moses and ask him the tough questions and he was greatly used of God in doing so (

Exo 18:12-24).

ii. Miriam and Aaron should have been afraid to speak against Moses because their criticism was petty and over something which was beyond control: The wife of Moses.

iii. Miriam and Aaron should have been afraid to speak against Moses because their criticism was simply not true; Moses was not a proud man, but the humblest man on earth.

iv. Miriam and Aaron should have been afraid to speak against Moses because their criticism was prompted by their own self-interest; they were jealous of all the attention Moses was receiving and wanted some of it for themselves.

v. Leaders in the house of God must make themselves accountable, and open to criticism and questioning - but need not make themselves quiet

targets for those whose criticism is petty, false, and self-motivated.

d. **So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them, and He departed:** After making His anger evident, the remarkable presence of God departed. This left an extremely uncomfortable pause for Miriam and Aaron.

C. God's punishment for Miriam and Aaron.

1. (10) *Miriam is made a leper.*

And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper.

a. **Suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow:** Leprosy was a disease of bodily decay and corruption; it was considered to be a "walking death" - and Miriam had a seriously advanced case of leprosy instantly. At this moment, God caused her body to reflect her heart.

b. **Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper:** It seems that Miriam did not immediately know this; the sense seems to be that Aaron noticed it first as he turned and looked.

2. (11-12) *Aaron's contrition.*

So Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord! Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned. Please do not let her be as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb!"

a. **Oh, my lord! Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned:** Aaron seems a man easily swayed;

swayed by a crowd wanting an idol, swayed by his sister (who seemed to be the instigator, because she is named first and was first struck with leprosy), and now swayed quickly back to a humble submission before Moses.

b. **Oh my lord! Please do not lay this sin on us:** Now Aaron called Moses his master, attributed to Moses the power to strike Miriam with leprosy, and confessed his previous criticism as foolish and sinful.

i. Sadly, we can't seem to separate Aaron's immediate and dramatic change of heart from the threat that he might be the next victim of God's judgment. His confession seems full of self-interest.

3. (13) *Moses prays for Miriam.*

So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "Please heal her, O God, I pray!"

a. **So Moses cried out to the LORD:** This was the first word spoken by Moses in this chapter. He had not spoken the entire time he was accused, leaving it up to God to answer his critics.

i. When a leader perceives accusations are petty, false, or self-motivated, the right thing to do is to ignore them, leave them up to God, and keep busy with what the LORD has called the leader to do - even as Jesus was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. (Isa 53:7)

b. **Please heal her, O God, I pray:** When Moses spoke, it was in prayer for his accusers. Moses certainly was a man faithful in the LORD's house.

4. (14-16) *The restoration of Miriam.*

Then the LORD said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and

afterward she may be received again." So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days, and the people did not journey till Miriam was brought in again. And afterward the people moved from Hazereth and camped in the Wilderness of Paran.

a. **Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and afterward she may be received again:** God did in fact heal Miriam. If she were still a leper, she would not have been allowed to remain in the camp of Israel. Yet, God allowed her to live with the outward display of her inward heart for seven days - and allowed the whole nation to know it.

b. **So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days:** This was appropriate, because Miriam had done something even more shameful than spitting in her father's face; she tried to bring down a leader of God's people with petty, false, and self-interested criticism.

Spies Sent into Canaan

Num 13:1 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 13:2 "Choose one of the leaders from each of the twelve tribes and send them as spies to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites."

Num 13:3 (3-15) Moses obeyed and from the wilderness of Paran he sent out leaders, as follows:

Tribe	Leader
Reuben	Shammua son of Zaccur
Simeon	Shaphat son of Hori
Judah	Caleb son of Jephunneh
Issachar	Igal son of Joseph
Ephraim	Hoshea son of Nun
Benjamin	Palti son of Raphu

Zebulun	Gaddiel son of Sodi
Manasseh	Gaddi son of Susi
Dan	Ammiel son of Gemalli
Asher	Sethur son of Michael
Naphtali	Nahbi son of Vophsi
Gad	Geuel son of Machi

Num 13:16 These are the spies Moses sent to explore the land. He changed the name of Hoshea son of Nun to Joshua.

Num 13:17 When Moses sent them out, he said to them, "Go north from here into the southern part of the land of Canaan and then on into the hill country.

Num 13:18 Find out what kind of country it is, how many people live there, and how strong they are.

Num 13:19 Find out whether the land is good or bad and whether the people live in open towns or in fortified cities.

Num 13:20 Find out whether the soil is fertile and whether the land is wooded. And be sure to bring back some of the fruit that grows there." (It was the season when grapes were beginning to ripen.)

Num 13:21 So the men went north and explored the land from the wilderness of Zin in the south all the way to Rehob, near Hamath Pass in the north.

Num 13:22 They went first into the southern part of the land and came to Hebron, where the clans of Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of a race of giants called the Anakim, lived. (Hebron was founded seven years before Zoan in Egypt.)

Num 13:23 They came to Eshcol Valley, and there they cut off a branch which had one bunch of grapes on it so heavy

that it took two men to carry it on a pole between them. They also brought back some pomegranates and figs.

Num 13:24 (That place was named Eshcol Valley because of the bunch of grapes the Israelites cut off there.)

Report of the Spies

Num 13:25 After exploring the land for forty days, the spies returned

Num 13:26 to Moses, Aaron, and the whole community of Israel at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran. They reported what they had seen and showed them the fruit they had brought.

Num 13:27 They told Moses, "We explored the land and found it to be rich and fertile; and here is some of its fruit.

Num 13:28 But the people who live there are powerful, and their cities are very large and well fortified. Even worse, we saw the descendants of the giants there.

Num 13:29 Amalekites live in the southern part of the land; Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country; and Canaanites live by the Mediterranean Sea and along the Jordan River."

Num 13:30 Caleb silenced the people who were complaining against Moses, and said, "We should attack now and take the land; we are strong enough to conquer it."

Num 13:31 But the men who had gone with Caleb said, "No, we are not strong enough to attack them; the people there are more powerful than we are."

Num 13:32 So they spread a false report among the Israelites about the land they had explored. They said, "That land doesn't even produce enough to feed the people who live there. Everyone we saw was very tall,

Num 13:33 and we even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. We felt as small as grasshoppers, and that is how we must have looked to them."

Numbers 13:1-33

Numbers 13 - Spies Are Sent Into Canaan

A. Spies are chosen and commissioned.

1. (1-3) The sending of the spies.

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them." So Moses sent them from the Wilderness of Paran according to the command of the LORD, all of them men who were heads of the children of Israel.

a. **Send men to spy out the land of Canaan:** These men were on a reconnaissance mission; to observe the land of Canaan and bring back a report to the nation. However, it is worthwhile to ask if they really *needed* to go on this mission or if there was useful information they lacked, which would prove vital in taking Canaan.

b. **From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them:** According to Deu 1:20-25, the plan to send spies did not directly originate with Moses, but came from the people. Moses told them simply to go and take the land, and the people suggested this plan to Moses (*everyone of you came near to me and said, Deu 1:22*). Furthermore, in Deu 1:23 Moses said, *the plan pleased me well*.

i. This expedition had an unfortunate result; it may very well be that Moses was wrong in taking this suggestion of the people. Perhaps the accusations of Miriam and Aaron (petty, false, and self-interested as they were) had made Moses hesitant to take strong leadership.

ii. Since the people of Israel initiated this excursion, perhaps Moses only came to God asking *how* to send out the spies, not *if* he should send out the spies. **From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them** describes the *method* of sending the spies.

c. **According to the command of the LORD:** Nevertheless, this was in the plan of God. God used the report of the spies as a test of Israel's faith.

2. (4-16) *The men chosen as spies.*

Now these were their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur; from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori; from the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; from the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph; from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun; from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu; from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi; from the tribe of Joseph, *that is*, from the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi; from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli; from the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael; from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsy; from the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi. These are the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua.

- a. **Now these were their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur:** One was chosen from each tribe, so the spies would represent the entire nation.
- b. **And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua:** Joshua was chosen as the leader of the group. His name was first listed as **Hoshea**, meaning

"salvation." Yet his name came to be Ya-Hoshea meaning, "Yahweh is salvation."

i. We can even imagine when Moses first met Joshua, and asked who he was. "I'm Hoshea" ["I'm salvation"], Joshua would reply. Moses would have smiled and replied, "Ya-Hoshea!" ["Yahweh is salvation!"]. Joshua became his name - and the name of the Messiah, who is our salvation.

3. (17-20) *Moses commissions the spies.*

Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, "Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains, and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not. Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land." Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes.

a. **See what the land is like:** Moses' direction to the spies was a subtle manifestation of unbelief. Did he really doubt that the land was good? Did he doubt that the land was rich? Did he doubt that there were useful forests? Did it matter if the people were strong or many, or if they lived in strongholds?

i. This was an entirely *reasonable* pursuit for Moses, and representative of the *curiosity* of the whole nation. After all, they had never seen this land, nor had any Israelite for some 400 years.

ii. God already told them what the land was like. At Moses' calling at the burning bush, God told him the land of Canaan was a *good and large land, to a land*

flowing with milk and honey (Exo 3:8), and Moses told the people of the goodness of the land (Exo 13:5).

b. **Whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak:** We wonder what the people of Israel thought they would do if a negative report came back. Would they resolve to return to Egypt?

B. The report of the spies.

1. (21-25) *The twelve spies in the Promised Land.*

So they went up and spied out the land from the Wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, near the entrance of Hamath. And they went up through the South and came to Hebron; Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, were there. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) Then they came to the Valley of Eshcol, and there cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes; they carried it between two of them on a pole. They also brought some of the pomegranates and figs. The place was called the Valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster which the men of Israel cut down there. And they returned from spying out the land after forty days.

a. **So they went up and spied out the land:** As these spies toured the land, they saw some of the people and the produce of the land. This spectacular produce included clusters of grapes so big, they had to be carried between two men on a pole.

b. **And they returned from spying out the land after forty days:** The reconnaissance mission took **forty days**. When God tested His people, He often used a period of forty (such as forty days or forty years).

2. (26-29) *The report of the land.*

Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. Then they told him, and said: "We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this *is* its fruit. Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land **are strong; the cities **are fortified and very large**; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan."**

- a. **We went to the land where you sent us:** They seemed to sense they were more on a mission from Israel than on a mission from God; we might already sense the report will be given according to a human perspective, not according to God's perspective.
- b. **It truly flows with milk and honey** - what God had promised about the land was indeed true.
- c. **Nevertheless:** The word **nevertheless** means "despite all of that." At that moment, Moses, and every man of faith in Israel should have cried out and said, 'Nevertheless nothing! How can one say, 'We went to the land, found it good, and God's promise true,' and then say, 'Despite all this...?'"
 - i. Despite God's faithful promise, **the people who dwell in the land are strong**.
 - ii. Despite God's faithful promise, **the cities are fortified and very large**.
 - iii. Despite God's faithful promise, **we saw the descendants of Anak** [a tribe of large men] **there**.

iv. Despite God's faithful promise, **the Amalekites dwell... the Amorites dwell... the Canaanites dwell** - all the land is taken up, there are no vacancies!

d. **Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there:**

It is hard to imagine a report more unbelieving and unfaithful to God than this; a report that recognizes the faithfulness of God's promise, the truth of His word, and yet says, "Despite all that..."

i. Whatever the exact nature of God's testing in the minds and hearts of the twelve spies during the forty days in Canaan, it is clear that they have, as a whole, failed the test!

3. (30) *Caleb's faithful objection.*

Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it."

a. **Then Caleb quieted the people:** Caleb - blessed forever! - commanded the people to immediately (**at once**) trust and obey God and to take the land, because God had made them able.

b. **Let us go up at once and take possession:** It took great courage for this man to stand against the tide of unbelief, of doubt and "despite all that" attitude. Caleb had the spirit of Rom 3:4 : *Let God be true but every man a liar.*

4. (31-33) *The other spies respond to Caleb.*

But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we." And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied

out, saying, "The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

a. But the men who had gone up with him said:

Their unbelieving response was a potent combination of truth, lies, and exaggeration.

i. It was true from a human perspective that **they are stronger than we** - but to say, "**we are not able to go up against the people**" was a lie.

ii. It was true that they had gone through the land - but to say, "**a land that devours its inhabitants**" was a lie.

iii. Each of the statements, "**All the men whom we saw in it are men of great stature**" or "

the giants" and "**we were like grasshoppers**" were all terrible exaggerations, plain and simple lies.

b. The land through which we have gone as spies:

Unbelief often presents itself as being "factual" or "practical" or "down to earth." Yet, the most factual, practical, and down to earth thing we can do is trust the word of the living God. Their unbelief was not according to the facts, but despite the facts.

i. Significantly, two men could see the exact same sights - the same grapes, the same men, the same land, the same cities - one can come away singing in faith, and the other is filled with a sense of certain doom. Ultimately, faith or unbelief does not spring from circumstances or environment, but from our hearts, which God must change.

The People Rebel

Num 14:1 All night long the people cried out in distress.

Num 14:2 They complained against Moses and Aaron, and said, "It would have been better to die in Egypt or even here in the wilderness!"

Num 14:3 Why is the LORD taking us into that land? We will be killed in battle, and our wives and children will be captured. Wouldn't it be better to go back to Egypt?"

Num 14:4 So they said to one another, "Let's choose a leader and go back to Egypt!"

Num 14:5 Then Moses and Aaron bowed to the ground in front of all the people.

Num 14:6 And Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, two of the spies, tore their clothes in sorrow

Num 14:7 and said to the people, "The land we explored is an excellent land.

Num 14:8 If the LORD is pleased with us, he will take us there and give us that rich and fertile land.

Num 14:9 Do not rebel against the LORD and don't be afraid of the people who live there. We will conquer them easily. The LORD is with us and has defeated the gods who protected them; so don't be afraid."

Num 14:10 The whole community was threatening to stone them to death, but suddenly the people saw the dazzling light of the LORD's presence appear over the Tent.

Num 14:11 The LORD said to Moses, "How much longer will these people reject me? How much longer will they refuse to trust in me, even though I have performed so many miracles among them?

Num 14:12 I will send an epidemic and destroy them, but I will make you the father of a nation that is larger and more powerful than they are!"

Moses Intercedes for the People

Num 14:13 But Moses said to the LORD, "You brought these people out of Egypt by your power. When the Egyptians hear what you have done to your people,

Num 14:14 they will tell it to the people who live in this land. These people have already heard that you, LORD, are with us, that you appear in plain sight when your cloud stops over us, and that you go before us in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

Num 14:15 Now if you kill all your people, the nations who have heard of your fame will say

Num 14:16 that you killed your people in the wilderness because you were not able to bring them into the land you promised to give them.

Num 14:17 So now, LORD, I pray, show us your power and do what you promised when you said,

Num 14:18 'I, the LORD, am not easily angered, and I show great love and faithfulness and forgive sin and rebellion. Yet I will not fail to punish children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation for the sins of their parents.'

Num 14:19 And now, LORD, according to the greatness of your unchanging love, forgive, I pray, the sin of these people, just as you have forgiven them ever since they left Egypt."

God Promises Judgment

Num 14:20 The LORD answered, "I will forgive them, as you have asked.

Num 14:21 But I promise that as surely as I live and as surely as my presence fills the earth,

Num 14:22 none of these people will live to enter that land. They have seen the dazzling light of my presence and the miracles that I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness,

but they have tried my patience over and over again and have refused to obey me.

Num 14:23 They will never enter the land which I promised to their ancestors. None of those who have rejected me will ever enter it.

Num 14:24 But because my servant Caleb has a different attitude and has remained loyal to me, I will bring him into the land which he explored, and his descendants will possess the land

Num 14:25 in whose valleys the Amalekites and the Canaanites now live. Turn back tomorrow and go into the wilderness in the direction of the Gulf of Aqaba."

Num 14:26 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron,

Num 14:27 "How much longer are these wicked people going to complain against me? I have heard enough of these complaints!

Num 14:28 Now give them this answer: 'I swear that as surely as I live, I will do to you just what you have asked. I, the LORD, have spoken.'

Num 14:29 You will die and your corpses will be scattered across this wilderness. Because you have complained against me, none of you over twenty years of age will enter that land.

Num 14:30 I promised to let you live there, but not one of you will, except Caleb and Joshua.

Num 14:31 You said that your children would be captured, but I will bring them into the land that you rejected, and it will be their home.

Num 14:32 You will die here in this wilderness.

Num 14:33 Your children will wander in the wilderness for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last one of you dies.

Num 14:34 You will suffer the consequences of your sin for forty years, one year for each of the forty days you spent

exploring the land. You will know what it means to have me against you!

Num 14:35 I swear that I will do this to you wicked people who have gathered together against me. Here in the wilderness every one of you will die. I, the LORD, have spoken.' "

Num 14:36 (36-37) The men Moses had sent to explore the land brought back a false report which caused the people to complain against the LORD. And so the LORD struck them with a disease, and they died.

Num 14:38 Of the twelve spies only Joshua and Caleb survived.

Israel Defeated in Battle

Num 14:39 When Moses told the Israelites what the LORD had said, they mourned bitterly.

Num 14:40 Early the next morning they started out to invade the hill country, saying, "Now we are ready to go to the place which the LORD told us about. We admit that we have sinned."

Num 14:41 But Moses said, "Then why are you disobeying the LORD now? You will not succeed!"

Num 14:42 Don't go. The LORD is not with you, and your enemies will defeat you.

Num 14:43 When you face the Amalekites and the Canaanites, you will die in battle; the LORD will not be with you, because you have refused to follow him."

Num 14:44 Yet they still dared to go up into the hill country, even though neither the LORD's Covenant Box nor Moses left the camp.

Num 14:45 Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived there attacked and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hormah.

Numbers 14:1-45

Numbers 14 - The People Reject Canaan

A. The rebellion of Israel at Kadesh Barnea.

1. (1) Israel rebels by mourning at their dilemma between faith and unbelief.

So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night.

a. **Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried:** The children of Israel were confronted with two reports regarding the Promised Land. Two of the twelve spies (Caleb and Joshua) say *Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it* (Num 13:30), but the other ten spies said, “what God promised about the land is true; nevertheless, the natives of the land are too mighty, and we cannot overcome them, despite what God has promised.”

i. We should not forget that the twelve spies were sent one from each tribe (Num 13:2); in this way, they truly represent the people of Israel, and the lack of faith of the majority of the spies is a lack of faith on behalf of the whole nation.

ii. We also must remember the details of how and why the spies were sent; the idea to send them did not originate with Moses or with God, but with the people (Deu 1:19-25); Moses unwisely agreed, and God merely told them how many spies to send and that they should represent the whole nation.

iii. But *why* were the spies sent? There was no military information needed; God had promised them victory over their enemies. Perhaps a reading of the terrain would have been helpful, but Moses told them to see if the land was good, and to see if the people

and cities were weak or strong ([Num 13:17-20](#)) - and this information indirectly led to the bad report of the ten spies!

b. **And the people wept that night:** The unbelief of the ten spies truly represented the unbelieving heart of the nation. Israel **wept that night** upon hearing that the enemies in Canaan were formidable. This mourning had a distinct character.

- i. It was mourning because God would not make it all "easy." We often somehow expect that of God, and resent adversity in our lives, forgetting the example of Jesus, who had it "harder" than any of us - and Whom we are not above.
- ii. It was mourning filled with a resentful attitude towards God, blaming Him for their "problem" - denying that He is a loving Father who cares for His children.
- iii. It was mourning that gave into the feeling of unbelief and fear; mourning that allowed feelings rule in one's life instead of faith in the living God. Here, their clinging to the feelings of fear and mourning is plain sin and rebellion, and their feelings did not by any means justify their rebellion. Clinging to feelings can be sin.
- iv. This was mourning over a loss. We usually mourn because something has died. Here, God was trying to cause something to die - the flesh, the sin-nature, the old man (as much as it could in an Old Covenant sense); and Israel mourned because they wanted the old man to live, not die.

c. **And the people wept that night:** So here, Israel stood barely a year out of Egypt, on the threshold of the Promised Land. Over the first ten chapters of Numbers

they had been fully prepared to walk as Promised Land people - they had been ordered and organized; cleansed and purified; set apart and blessed; taught how to give and how to function as priests; had been made to remember judgment spared and deliverance brought; and had been given God's presence as a guide and the tools needed to lead the people.

- i. Now God invited them to take the land - and they rebelled through their mourning. Unbelief made them think of God's good for them (the gift of the Promised Land) as something evil.

2. (2-3a) *Israel rebels by murmuring.*

And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims?"

a. And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron: Their murmuring was directed first towards **Moses and Aaron**, but since these were the LORD's leaders, they were murmuring against the LORD. The vision of Moses and Aaron (to lead these people into the Promised Land) is the LORD's vision. Their complaint is against the LORD, even if they want to hide it by directing to Moses and Aaron.

- i. Probably some falsely "spiritual" folks among the murmurers said, "Oh no, we trust the LORD. We love the LORD. We would never rebel against the LORD. It's Moses and Aaron we don't like."
- ii. But Joshua and Caleb knew: *Only do not rebel against the LORD* (Num 14:9), and the LORD Himself

knew: *How long will these people reject Me?*
(Num 14:11)

b. **If only we had died:** The challenge of faith before the people seemed so great - and so grievous - that they would rather have died than go on with what the LORD has for them.

i. Tragically for this generation, God would give them what their rebellious, unbelieving hearts wanted.

c. **Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword:** Here, they directly accused the Almighty with sin and evil towards them. They were angry with God, accusing Him of plotting the murder of them and their **wives and children**.

i. This was a deep state of rebellion. God, who can do no evil, with Whom there is no shadow of turning, was called *evil* and a *murderer* by His own people.

ii. Some counsel it is a healthy thing to be angry with God, and to let it all out, so that God and you can be reconciled, as sort of a matter of counseling therapy. While it is true that one may be angry with God, and should take every such feeling to God, it is wrong to ever assume or imply that such feelings are justified. If we are angry at God, we are in sin, because God has never done anything that deserves us being angry. We should honestly bring such sin before God, but never for a moment feeling it to be justified.

d. **That our wives and children should become victims:** The unbelieving among Israel justified their unbelief on the basis of concern for their **wives and children**. Tragically, because of their unbelief they would die in the wilderness and their **children** - a new generation of faith - would inherit the promised land.

3. (3b-4) *They rebel by longing for the memory of Egypt.*

Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt."

a. **Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt:**

This was *not* better. In the first ten chapters of Numbers, God led Israel through a process intended to change them from a slave-minded people to be a "promised-land" people. Here, they completely revert back to their slave mentality, preferring slavery under cruel, murdering masters than the walk of faith God has for them.

i. Make no mistake; what Israel rejected here was a walk of faith. If God was going to lead them into a deeper trust than they had before, they wanted no part of it. If He made it all easy, that was fine with them - but they did not want a walk of *faith*.

b. **Let us select a leader and return to Egypt:** This was pure rebellion. They said that they did not want God's plan, they did not want God's leaders, and they did not want God's land. They believed that they knew better than God.

i. Notice how *man-centered* their rebellion was: **They said to one another** (the decision was made among themselves, believing their majority vote had more wisdom than God). **Let us select** (they didn't like God's selection, so they wanted a leader who would truly represent them - in all their rebellion against God).

4. (5-9) *The reaction of the godly against the rebellion of the people.*

Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of

Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: "The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.' Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them."

- a. **Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces:** Moses and Aaron were older and wiser and therefore knew how bad the situation was. They simply prostrated themselves in prayer and said not a word to the people (knowing it would do no good), but they knew that they must cry out to God for a miracle if Israel is to be spared.
- b. **But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh:** Joshua and Caleb, the two faithful spies, are younger and more optimistic, so they attempt to persuade the people.
 - i. They **tore their clothes**, showing utter grief and mourning; acting as if someone had died - or was about to die.
 - ii. **The land... is an exceedingly good land;** they reminded the people of the faithfulness of God's promise. He promised the land would be good, and it was - they saw it with their own eyes. If God promised we could take possession of it, they could trust that promise also.
 - iii. **Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people... the LORD is with us:** Their fear and unbelief were willful rebellion. Therefore, Joshua and Caleb appealed to their will of the people, asking them

to decide to give up their rebellion and return to the LORD. The people of Israel didn't have to give in to their feelings of fear, of anger to the LORD, of unbelief. By God's grace they could choose to submit to Him and trust Him.

5. (10) *Two responses to the appeal of Joshua and Caleb.*

And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel.

- a. **All the congregation said to stone them with stones:** This was the response of the people. Rebellious, carnal man cannot endure the men of faith, who came with the challenge of faith. They would
kill Joshua and Caleb for calling them to forsake their unbelief and to trust God.
 - i. Nothing can be more vexing, more aggravating to the child of God in rebellion than another child of God who is full of faith and submission to God - and who has godly counsel.

- b. **The glory of the LORD appeared:** This was the response of the LORD. We are not yet told what the glory of the LORD would do, but it isn't hard to figure out. Their actions and feelings were not consistent with the glory of the LORD.

- Was it consistent with the glory of the LORD to be unbelieving?
- Was it consistent with the glory of the LORD to mourn because the walk of faith was hard?
- Was it consistent with the glory of the LORD to long for death?
- Was it consistent with the glory of the LORD to accuse God of plotting murder?

- Was it consistent with the glory of the LORD to go back to the slavery of Egypt?
- Was it consistent with the glory of the LORD to reject God's leaders and go with "the people's choice"?
- Was it consistent with the glory of the LORD to threaten to kill those who call you to a deeper life of trust in God?

B. Moses' spectacular intercession for the children of Israel.

1. (11-12) *God's charge against Israel and offer to Moses.*

Then the LORD said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."

a. **The LORD said to Moses:** God does not even speak with the nation; He knows they are past hearing Him. He will speak with Moses, and Moses alone.

i. Many a child of God in rebellion wonders why they do not hear the voice of God anymore; why should they? They are rejecting what God has already said, do they think they can be open to what more He might say?

b. **How long will these people reject Me:** God had been only good to Israel and had demonstrated His loving strength towards them countless times. Israel's rejection of God makes no sense.

c. **I will strike them... and disinherit them... I will make of you a nation greater and mightier:** This is a dramatic offer to Moses; God says He will give rebellious Israel what they deserve - judgment (indeed, what they

said they wanted - to die in the wilderness! [14:2]), and He will fulfill His promises of a land, nation, and blessing to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through Moses instead!

- i. This was heady stuff for Moses; he is offered the position of "patriarch" - to become a father for Israel in the same way Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were. Moses knew of their greatness and fame - he was used of God to compile their stories in the book of Genesis!
- ii. We must regard this as a real "offer" from God; the LORD does not speak make-believe words. If Moses were to do nothing, this plan of God would go into effect - the nation would perish, and somehow, God would start all over again with Moses - and the new nation would be better (**greater and mightier**) than the present one!
- iii. Moses had a similar "offer" from God back in Exo 32:7-14; will Moses react in the same way now as then?

2. (13-16) *Moses intercedes for Israel, appealing to God's glory.*

And Moses said to the LORD: "Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them, and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, LORD, are among these people; that You, LORD, are seen face to face and Your cloud stands above them, and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if You kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your fame will speak, saying, Because the LORD was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness."

- a. **And Moses said to the LORD:** Moses did not entertain God's offer for a moment. Instead, he pled for the nation and loved them despite their rebellion, and he was zealous for the glory of God.
- b. **Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them:** Moses' zeal for God's glory was evident. He knew that if God wiped out the present nation and started again with Moses, it would be a black mark on His reputation before the nations - especially Egypt.
 - i. Perhaps then the nations could claim that **the LORD was not able to bring this people to the land.** It could be said that the sin and rebellion of man was greater than the power and goodness of God.
- c. **Which He swore to give them:** Moses brought God's promise before Him. He begged God to not give the nations any opportunity to think God has not been true to His word.

3. (17-19) *Moses intercedes for Israel, appealing to God's power and promise.*

"And now, I pray, let the power of my LORD be great, just as You have spoken, saying, 'The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.' Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

- a. **Let the power of my LORD be great:** Moses glories in the power of God but asks that God would use His

power by showing mercy and longsuffering to a rebellious Israel.

b. **Just as You have spoken:** The list of Num 14:18-19 is almost a quote from the words of self-revelation God spoke to Moses in the dramatic encounter Moses had with God in Exo 34:6-8.

i. **Long-suffering... abundant... forgiving iniquity and transgression... by no means clears the guilty... mercy:** Each of these are mentioned first in Exo 34:6-8.

ii. Moses basically said: "LORD, you have revealed Yourself to me by Your word. Your word declares who You are. Now LORD, please act towards Israel according to who You have declared Yourself to be in Your word.

c. **Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy:** Moses knew God's power and appealed to it; Moses knew God's promise and appealed to it, and Moses knew God's glory and appealed to it. This was a spectacular example of intercession.

i. What made this intercession spectacular was not primarily Moses' method (appealing to God's glory, power, and promise); but Moses' heart. Here, Moses is totally others-centered, not concerned for his own glory, but only for Israel. He displays he shares the heart of God towards His people, and that is what made Moses' intercession spectacular.

ii. This, of course, was God's intention all along: To develop and draw out of Moses just this kind of heart, transforming Moses into the image of His Son (Rom 8:29), long before the time of Jesus.

C. The fate of Israel after the rebellion at Kadesh Barnea.

1. (20) *God's promise of pardon in response to Moses' intercession.*

Then the LORD said: "I have pardoned, according to your word;

a. **I have pardoned:** The heart of Moses and his method of intercession were successful. These are sweet words for any sinner to hear.

b. **According to your word:** This means that Moses' prayer *mattered*. Some may wonder if prayer is some elaborate game, where God threatens to do something He will never do anyway, and we pray, pretending to believe God will do what He has threatened, and when God hears us pray, He forgets His idle threat and does what He was going to do anyway. Prayer definitely does not work that way.

i. We don't understand the relationship between the eternal, sovereign plan of God and our prayers; but we know it is no game. God never wanted Moses to think of it as a game and wanted Moses to at least think that his prayers had directly affected the outcome: **I have pardoned, according to your word!** We should pray as if life and death, heaven and hell, would be decided by our prayers!

2. (21-25) *The fate of the rebels and the fate of the faithful.*

"But truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD; because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected

Me see it. But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it. Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valley; tomorrow turn and move out into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea."

- a. **But truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD:** God's response to Israel would be full of and reflective of His glory. He would show mercy and pardon, but in a way consistent with His glory.
- b. **They certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it:** Therefore, those who put God to the test and rebelled against His promise, would not see the Promised Land. But the faithful like Caleb would inherit the land.
 - i. Look at the high praise heaped upon Caleb: **My servant Caleb... he has a different spirit in him... [he] has followed Me fully... I will bring into the land.** Caleb's stand of faith seemed futile when Israel rejected him; but it was richly rewarded by God.
- c. **Tomorrow turn and move out into the wilderness:** God had brought them to the threshold of the Promised Land, but they rebelled against Him, and did not enter - so God will send them back to the wilderness.
 - i. Israel has demonstrated they are still slave-minded; they do not think like Promised Land people. It will take more wilderness training until they are a people ready to live in the Promised Land!

3. (26-35) *The death sentence upon the rebels.*

And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, "How long *shall I bear with* this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me. Say to them, 'As I live,' says the LORD, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as *for* you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, *namely* forty years, and you shall know My rejection. I the LORD have spoken this; I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die."

a. **All of you who were numbered... from twenty years old and above:** God gave the message to the nation - this generation must die in the wilderness and would never see the Promised Land. It was as if God said to them, "You didn't want it when it was offered to you, so now you will never have it."

i. They said, *If only we had died in this wilderness!* (Num 14:2). God will now give them their desire. If

they preferred death to a walk of faith, God would make that their destiny.

b. **Except for Caleb... and Joshua:** These men of faith were the glorious exceptions. They would enter into the land of promise because they have the hearts and minds of new men.

i. Not even Moses and Aaron were excepted. They would also not enter the Promised Land, each for their own reasons. But we remember that Moses was not guiltless in this whole tragedy, having agreed to the request of the people to send out spies instead of just boldly taking the land by faith.

c. **But your little ones:** When excusing their unbelief, Israel had claimed concern for their children (Num 14:3), accusing God of wanting to murder them. Now, ironically, their children would inherit the land, while they perished in the wilderness.

d. **The land which you despised:** We may imagine many in Israel objected saying, "We did not despise the land. We wanted it. We were just afraid." But they did despise it, because as much as anything, it was a land of faith for people of faith, and the unbelieving and rebellious do despise the land.

e. **Forty days... forty years:** The spies, representing the nation, failed in the test of 40 days. Now the nation would be tested 40 years - and they would come forth purified, ready to inherit the Promised Land, but only after the man of unbelief and rebellion has perished in the wilderness.

i. The old man, the man still slave-minded to sin, can *never* enter into God's promises; the old man must die - and God will do whatever it takes to make that happen.

ii. This turning point in Israel's history is an essential lesson for every believer and is trumpeted to us in Psa 95:7 b-11: *Today, if you will hear His voice: Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; they tried Me, though they saw My work. For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, 'It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'*

iii. *Then they despised the pleasant land; they did not believe His word, but complained in their tents, and did not heed the voice of the LORD. Therefore He raised up His hand in an oath against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness, to overthrow their descendants among the nations, and to scatter them in the lands.* (Psa 106:24-27)

iv. *But they and our fathers acted proudly, hardened their necks, and did not heed Your commandments. They refused to obey, and they were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them. But they hardened their necks, and in their rebellion they appointed a leader to return to their bondage.* (Neh 9:16-17)

v. Heb 3:7 to Heb 4:16 makes it clear: God has a place of rest and promise for every believer to enter in to, and it can only be entered by faith. The man of unbelief, self-reliance, and self-focus can never enter into God's rest and abundance.

4. (36-38) *An immediate death sentence upon the ten unfaithful spies.*

Now the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation complain against him by bringing a bad report of the land,

those very men who brought the evil report about the land, died by the plague before the LORD. But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive, of the men who went to spy out the land.

a. **Now the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land... died by the plague before the LORD:** If the death of the unbelieving generation would take some 38 years (the number of years left to make a total time of the exodus forty years), the death of the ten unfaithful spies was immediate.

b. **Died by the plague before the LORD:** God has one prescription for the old man, and the flesh: *to kill it*. It can't be reformed. We are not called to turn over a new leaf for God. The old man dies, and only then can the new man, patterned after Jesus Christ, inherit God's land of rest and promise.

5. (39-45) *Aftermath: Failure of the attempt to take the Promised Land by man's strength and wisdom.*

Then Moses told these words to all the children of Israel, and the people mourned greatly. And they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, "Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised, for we have sinned!" And Moses said, "Now why do you transgress the command of the LORD? For this will not succeed. Do not go up, lest you be defeated by your enemies, for the LORD is not among you. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned away from the LORD, the LORD will not be with you." But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop; nevertheless, neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed from the

camp. Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah.

- a. **The people mourned greatly:** They were indeed sorry; many people are sorry for the consequence of their sin. But they were not so sorry as to turn their hearts to a genuine trust of the LORD.
- b. **They rose early... went up to the top of the mountain... “Here we are, and we will go up . . .we have sinned!”** They wanted to make it all better with a few religious works and words, but their hearts were not changed. All this was on their initiative, as a way of doing God’s will *their way*, and hoping to reap the same blessings. It could not work. Moses spoke rightly: **For this will not succeed.**
- c. **The Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah:** It did not succeed because God was not with them. They made a futile attempt in the flesh to accomplish what they had rejected by faith, and it ended in defeat. It was now back to the wilderness.
 - i. When God was with them, they did not think it was enough; now that God was *not* with them, they thought they could do it.

Laws About Sacrifices

Num 15:1 The LORD gave Moses

Num 15:2 the following regulations for the people of Israel to observe in the land that he was going to give them.

Num 15:3 A bull, a ram, a sheep, or a goat may be presented to the LORD as a burnt offering or as a sacrifice in fulfillment of a vow or as a freewill offering or as an offering at your regular religious festivals; the odor of these food offerings is pleasing to the LORD.

Num 15:4 (4-5) Whoever presents a sheep or a goat as a burnt offering to the LORD is to bring with each animal 2 pounds of flour mixed with 2 pints of olive oil as a grain offering, together with 2 pints of wine.

Num 15:6 When a ram is offered, 4 pounds of flour mixed with 3 pints of olive oil are to be presented as a grain offering,

Num 15:7 together with 3 pints of wine. The odor of these sacrifices is pleasing to the LORD.

Num 15:8 When a bull is offered to the LORD as a burnt offering or as a sacrifice in fulfillment of a vow or as a fellowship offering,

Num 15:9 a grain offering of 6 pounds of flour mixed with 4 pints of olive oil is to be presented,

Num 15:10 together with 4 pints of wine. The odor of this sacrifice is pleasing to the LORD.

Num 15:11 That is what shall be offered with each bull, ram, sheep, or goat.

Num 15:12 When more than one animal is offered, the accompanying offering is to be increased proportionately.

Num 15:13 All native Israelites are to do this when they present a food offering, an odor pleasing to the LORD.

Num 15:14 And if at any time foreigners living among you, whether on a temporary or a permanent basis, make a food offering, an odor that pleases the LORD, they are to observe the same regulations.

Num 15:15 For all time to come, the same rules are binding on you and on the foreigners who live among you. You and they are alike in the LORD's sight;

Num 15:16 the same laws and regulations apply to you and to them.

Num 15:17 The LORD gave Moses

Num 15:18 the following regulations for the people of Israel to observe in the land that he was going to give them.

Num 15:19 When any food produced there is eaten, some of it is to be set aside as a special contribution to the LORD.

Num 15:20 When you bake bread, the first loaf of the first bread made from the new grain is to be presented as a special contribution to the LORD. This is to be presented in the same way as the special contribution you make from the grain you thresh.

Num 15:21 For all time to come, this special gift is to be given to the LORD from the bread you bake.

Laws About Unintentional Sins

Num 15:22 But suppose someone unintentionally fails to keep some of these regulations which the LORD has given Moses.

Num 15:23 And suppose that in the future the community fails to do everything that the LORD commanded through Moses.

Num 15:24 If the mistake was made because of the ignorance of the community, they are to offer a bull as a burnt offering, an odor that pleases the LORD, with the proper grain offering and wine offering. In addition, they are to offer a male goat as a sin offering.

Num 15:25 The priest shall perform the ritual of purification for the community, and they will be forgiven, because the mistake was unintentional and they brought their sin offering as a food offering to the LORD.

Num 15:26 The whole community of Israel and the foreigners living among them will be forgiven, because everyone was involved in the mistake.

Num 15:27 If any of you sin unintentionally, you are to offer a one-year-old female goat as a sin offering.

Num 15:28 At the altar the priest shall perform the ritual of purification to purify you from your sin, and you will be forgiven.

Num 15:29 The same regulation applies to all who unintentionally commit a sin, whether they are native Israelites or resident foreigners.

Num 15:30 But any who sin deliberately, whether they are natives or foreigners, are guilty of treating the LORD with contempt, and they shall be put to death,

Num 15:31 because they have rejected what the LORD said and have deliberately broken one of his commands. They are responsible for their own death.

A Sabbathbreaker Executed

Num 15:32 Once, while the Israelites were still in the wilderness, a man was found gathering firewood on the Sabbath.

Num 15:33 He was taken to Moses, Aaron, and the whole community,

Num 15:34 and was put under guard, because it was not clear what should be done with him.

Num 15:35 Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man must be put to death; the whole community is to stone him to death outside the camp."

Num 15:36 So the whole community took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the LORD had commanded.

Tassels on Garments

Num 15:37 The LORD commanded Moses

Num 15:38 to say to the people of Israel: "Make tassels on the corners of your garments and put a blue cord on each tassel. You are to do this for all time to come.

Num 15:39 The tassels will serve as reminders, and each time you see them you will remember all my commands and

obey them; then you will not turn away from me and follow your own wishes and desires.

Num 15:40 The tassels will remind you to keep all my commands, and you will belong completely to me.

Num 15:41 I am the LORD your God; I brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the LORD."

Numbers 15:1-41

Numbers 15 - Various Laws and Provisions

A. Grain, drink, and wave offerings.

1. (1-5) *The sacrifice of a lamb to be accompanied with grain and wine.*

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you have come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving to you, and you make an offering by fire to the LORD, a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or in your appointed feasts, to make a sweet aroma to the LORD, from the herd or the flock, then he who presents his offering to the LORD shall bring a grain offering of one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of oil; and one-fourth of a hin of wine as a drink offering you shall prepare with the burnt offering or the sacrifice, for each lamb.'"

a. Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them:

Israel was at one of its lowest points in history. It had just rebelliously rejected God's offer to bring the nation into the Promised Land. God had consigned them to wander in the wilderness for 38 years, until the unbelieving generation had perished in the wilderness and a new generation of faith would take the Promised Land. Yet, immediately after this stinging rebellion and

the chastisement from the LORD, Israel received precious tokens of God's mercy, care, and help to Israel.

b. **And you make an offering by fire to the LORD, a burnt offering or a sacrifice:** God was merciful to Israel, in that this section deals with sacrifice, sacrifice to cover sin and sacrifice as an expression of thanksgiving. Israel, at their point of failure, needed to be reminded of sacrificial atonement, and the need to give thanks - even in the wilderness.

i. The grain with the drink offering of wine meant to accompany the blood sacrifice speak of thanksgiving and joy; we really can have thanksgiving and joy in the LORD, even if we are smarting from our own failure and from the loving correction of God.

ii. This passage also shows how God helped Israel. This section reads just like the passages of law God had so patiently instructed Israel with at Sinai; now, after their failure at Kadesh-Barnea, God is taking them back to school.

c. **When you have come into the land:** God cared for Israel. These were commands that could only be fulfilled in the Promised Land. Inherent in these commands was the promise that God *would* lead them there and would *not* leave them in the wilderness forever.

i. God said, "**When you have come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving to you.**" He said, **when** you come into land, and not *if* you come into the land. God has not and will not give up on Israel. Many a believer under the rod of God's correction has felt abandoned by God, as if He had given up on them, but God is always near to the believer under correction.

2. (6-7) The sacrifice of a ram to be accompanied with grain and wine.

Or for a ram you shall prepare as a grain offering two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-third of a hin of oil; and as a drink offering you shall offer one-third of a hin of wine as a sweet aroma to the LORD.

3. (8-10) The sacrifice of a bull to be accompanied with grain and wine.

And when you prepare a young bull as a burnt offering, or as a sacrifice to fulfill a vow, or as a peace offering to the LORD, then shall be offered with the young bull a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with half a hin of oil; and you shall bring as the drink offering half a hin of wine as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD.

a. Fine flour mixed with half a hin of oil: The offering of the ram and bull each needed progressively greater amounts of grain and wine to accompany them, because they were progressively bigger sacrifices. The greater our sacrifice unto the LORD, the more thanksgiving and joy should come with the offering.

4. (11-16) The universal character of these laws.

Thus it shall be done for each young bull, for each ram, or for each lamb or young goat. According to the number that you prepare, so you shall do with everyone according to their number. All who are native-born shall do these things in this manner, in presenting an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD. And if a stranger dwells with you, or whoever is among you throughout your generations, and would present an offering made by fire, a sweet

aroma to the LORD, just as you do, so shall he do. One ordinance *shall be* for you of the assembly and for the stranger who dwells *with you*, an ordinance forever throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the stranger be before the LORD. One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you.

a. **Thus it shall be done for each:** Everyone who made a sacrifice had to bring it with the thanksgiving of grain and the joy of wine; God did not want grudging, griping sacrifices brought to Him. If one could not serve *the LORD with gladness* (Psa 100:2), then God didn't want his service at all.

5. (17-21) *A heave offering of thanksgiving to the LORD.*

Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land to which I bring you, then it will be, when you eat of the bread of the land, that you shall offer up a heave offering to the LORD. You shall offer up a cake of the first of your ground meal as a heave offering; as a heave offering of the threshing floor, so shall you offer it up. Of the first of your ground meal you shall give to the LORD a heave offering throughout your generations.'"

a. **When you come into the land in which I bring you:** This shows how rich in promise and encouragement these commands are. God sets their mind on the Promised Land, even though they are a long way away from it. Keeping their minds on His promise will help see them through the wilderness and prepare the hearts of the new generation to succeed where the old generation failed.

b. **Then it will be:** This set their minds *forward* to the promise. Even if a child of God isn't walking in the

richness of God's promises now, they need to set their mind on heavenly places. Eph 2:6 says God has *raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus* - even if it doesn't feel like it now, set your mind on those heavenly places!

B. Remedies for sin.

1. (22-29) *Addressing unintentional sin, both as a nation and individuals.*

If you sin unintentionally, and do not observe all these commandments which the LORD has spoken to Moses; all that the LORD has commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day the LORD gave commandment and onward throughout your generations; then it will be, if it is unintentionally committed, without the knowledge of the congregation, that the whole congregation shall offer one young bull as a burnt offering, as a sweet aroma to the LORD, with its grain offering and its drink offering, according to the ordinance, and one kid of the goats as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for the whole congregation of the children of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them, for it was unintentional; they shall bring their offering, an offering made by fire to the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD, for their unintended sin. It shall be forgiven the whole congregation of the children of Israel and the stranger who dwells among them, because all the people *did it* unintentionally. And if a person sins unintentionally, then he shall bring a female goat in its first year as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for the person who sins unintentionally, when he sins unintentionally before the LORD, to make atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. You shall have

one law for him who sins unintentionally, for him who is native-born among the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwells among them.

a. **If you sin unintentionally:** Significantly, the Bible talks about sins **unintentionally committed**. Many today think and live as if an action is unintentional, it cannot be sin. But many of the worst sins are committed with the best of intentions. Intentions matter nothing when the result is sin.

i. Especially in the 20th century, all sorts of horrific atrocities and terror have been committed by those dedicated to honorable causes; Communism sought to establish a just, fair economy where each worked according to his ability and received according to his need - and became the instrument of the genocide of tens of millions of people.

ii. Today, in the church, many a gossip, many a talebearer, many a divisive person will claim the best of intentions. Even if we agree they have the right intentions, they still may be in grievous sin. The same applies for a myriad of other sins we are often ready to ignore or think lightly of, all on the basis of "after all, they had good intentions."

b. **That the whole congregation shall offer one young bull as a burnt offering:** Unintentional sins needed a blood atonement; a bull had to be sacrificed when the nation as a whole was guilty, and a female goat had to be sacrificed when an individual was guilty.

c. **You shall have one law for him who sins unintentionally:** There was to be no exception. Sin is sin, and must be accounted as such, even if the motive seemed good.

2. (30-31) *Addressing presumptuous sin.*

But the person who does *anything* presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt *shall be upon him*.

a. **But the person who does anything presumptuously:** Literally, to sin **presumptuously** means to sin “with a high hand.” It speaks of a flagrant rebellion against God, the law of Moses, and the nation as a whole.

b. **That person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him:** Such sin was not to be tolerated in Israel. This command was a cultural mechanism for addressing this sin and ensuring that such arrogant flaunting of public morality would not be rewarded.

i. This is in stark contrast to modern culture where notorious, flagrant sinners are rewarded with fame and fortune. Instead of **his guilt shall be upon him**, our society puts guilt on anyone who would judge or condemn such depraved individuals by calling what they do evil.

3. (32-36) *Execution of a Sabbath violator.*

Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him. Then the LORD said to Moses, “The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.” So, as the LORD commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him

outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.

a. **They found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day:** This was an immediate example of dealing with someone who sinned presumptuously. All of Israel knew the Sabbath law, and this man no doubt thought himself a courageous social reformer, trying by his example to free the nation from the shackles of heaven's law.

i. "It seems likely that the following story of the sabbath breaker illustrates what sinning with a high hand means." (Wenham)

b. **The man must surely be put to death:** Instead, God commanded the execution of this presumptuous sinner, that all might fear. This was so all would know that the social order and law of God are more important than any individual's "right" to attack or destroy that social order or law of God.

4. (37-41) *Reminders for a holy people.*

Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God."

a. **Tassels on the corners of their garments and the blue thread in the tassels of the corners:** These were intended to remind Israel to Whom they belonged; they were God's people. Such reminders are an effective preventive remedy for sin.

i. Perhaps a **blue thread** was commanded because the ark of the covenant was covered with a blue cloth, blue curtains adorned the tabernacle, and blue was in the high priest's garments. The color blue was full of holy reminders.

b. **That you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them:** We might imagine an Israelite being tempted into some kind of sin, and then catching sight of his own distinctive garments - reminding him of who he is and reminding him that others can see who he is: A child of God, and not a child of the sin he is contemplating.

i. In this sense, Christian theme clothing and jewelry and such can indeed serve a purpose. Such things can remind us of who we are and provide a kind of "walking accountability" for our conduct.

ii. However, man's instinctive pride always has a way of perverting such good and holy commands of God; in Jesus' day, He directly rebuked the abuse of this command among the religious elite, speaking of how they would *enlarge the borders of their garments* (Mat 23:5), making the tasseled area as conspicuous as possible, as an ostentatious display of their "holiness."

iii. The same can also be said of today's Christian theme clothing and jewelry; it can also be abused in the same self-righteous, hypocritical manner.

Korah's Rebellion

Num 16:1 (1-2) Korah son of Izhar, from the Levite clan of Kohath, rebelled against the leadership of Moses. He was joined by three members of the tribe of Reuben—Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth—and by 250 other Israelites, well-known leaders chosen by the community.

Num 16:3 They assembled before Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! All the members of the community belong to the LORD, and the LORD is with all of us. Why, then, Moses, do you set yourself above the LORD's community?"

Num 16:4 When Moses heard this, he threw himself on the ground and prayed.

Num 16:5 Then he said to Korah and his followers, "Tomorrow morning the LORD will show us who belongs to him; he will let the one who belongs to him, that is, the one he has chosen, approach him at the altar.

Num 16:6 (6-7) Tomorrow morning you and your followers take fire pans, put live coals and incense on them, and take them to the altar. Then we will see which of us the LORD has chosen. You Levites are the ones who have gone too far!"

Num 16:8 Moses continued to speak to Korah. "Listen, you Levites!

Num 16:9 Do you consider it a small matter that the God of Israel has set you apart from the rest of the community, so that you can approach him, perform your service in the LORD's Tent, and minister to the community and serve them?

Num 16:10 He has let you and all the other Levites have this honor—and now you are trying to get the priesthood too!

Num 16:11 When you complain against Aaron, it is really against the LORD that you and your followers are

rebell ing."

Num 16:12 Then Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram, but they said, "We will not come!"

Num 16:13 Isn't it enough that you have brought us out of the fertile land of Egypt to kill us here in the wilderness? Do you also have to lord it over us?

Num 16:14 You certainly have not brought us into a fertile land or given us fields and vineyards as our possession, and now you are trying to deceive us. We will not come!"

Num 16:15 Moses became angry and said to the LORD, "Do not accept any offerings these men bring. I have not wronged any of them; I have not even taken one of their donkeys."

Num 16:16 Moses said to Korah, "Tomorrow you and your 250 followers must come to the Tent of the LORD's presence; Aaron will also be there.

Num 16:17 Each of you will take his fire pan, put incense on it, and then present it at the altar."

Num 16:18 So they each took their fire pans, put live coals and incense on them, and stood at the entrance of the Tent with Moses and Aaron.

Num 16:19 Then Korah gathered the whole community, and they stood facing Moses and Aaron at the entrance of the Tent. Suddenly the dazzling light of the LORD's presence appeared to the whole community,

Num 16:20 and the LORD said to Moses and Aaron,

Num 16:21 "Move back from these people, and I will destroy them immediately."

Num 16:22 But Moses and Aaron bowed down with their faces to the ground and said, "O God, you are the source of all life. When one of us sins, do you become angry with the whole community?"

Num 16:23 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 16:24 "Tell the people to move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram."

Num 16:25 Then Moses, accompanied by the leaders of Israel, went to Dathan and Abiram.

Num 16:26 He said to the people, "Get away from the tents of these wicked men and don't touch anything that belongs to them. Otherwise, you will be wiped out with them for all their sins."

Num 16:27 So they moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram had come out and were standing at the entrance of their tents, with their wives and children.

Num 16:28 Moses said to the people, "This is how you will know that the LORD has sent me to do all these things and that it is not by my own choice that I have done them.

Num 16:29 If these men die a natural death without some punishment from God, then the LORD did not send me.

Num 16:30 But if the LORD does something unheard of, and the earth opens up and swallows them with all they own, so that they go down alive to the world of the dead, you will know that these men have rejected the LORD."

Num 16:31 As soon as he had finished speaking, the ground under Dathan and Abiram split open

Num 16:32 and swallowed them and their families, together with all of Korah's followers and their possessions.

Num 16:33 So they went down alive to the world of the dead, with their possessions. The earth closed over them, and they vanished.

Num 16:34 All the people of Israel who were there fled when they heard their cry. They shouted, "Run! The earth might swallow us too!"

Num 16:35 Then the LORD sent a fire that blazed out and burned up the 250 men who had presented the incense.

Num 16:36 Then the LORD said to Moses,

Num 16:37 "Tell Eleazar son of Aaron the priest to remove the bronze fire pans from the remains of those who have been burned, and scatter the coals from the fire pans somewhere else, because the fire pans are holy.

Num 16:38 They became holy when they were presented at the LORD's altar. So take the fire pans of these who were put to death for their sin, beat them into thin plates, and make a covering for the altar. It will be a warning to the people of Israel."

Num 16:39 So Eleazar the priest took the fire pans and had them beaten into thin plates to make a covering for the altar.

Num 16:40 This was a warning to the Israelites that no one who was not a descendant of Aaron should come to the altar to burn incense for the LORD. Otherwise he would be destroyed like Korah and his men. All this was done as the LORD had commanded Eleazar through Moses.

Num 16:41 The next day the whole community complained against Moses and Aaron and said, "You have killed some of the LORD's people."

Num 16:42 After they had all gathered to protest to Moses and Aaron, they turned toward the Tent and saw that the cloud was covering it and that the dazzling light of the LORD's presence had appeared.

Num 16:43 Moses and Aaron went and stood in front of the Tent,

Num 16:44 and the LORD said to Moses,

Num 16:45 "Move back from these people, and I will destroy them on the spot!" The two of them bowed down with their faces to the ground,

Num 16:46 and Moses said to Aaron, "Take your fire pan, put live coals from the altar in it, and put some incense on the coals. Then hurry with it to the people and perform the

ritual of purification for them. Hurry! The LORD's anger has already broken out and an epidemic has already begun."

Num 16:47 Aaron obeyed, took his fire pan and ran into the middle of the assembled people. When he saw that the plague had already begun, he put the incense on the coals and performed the ritual of purification for the people.

Num 16:48 This stopped the plague, and he was left standing between the living and the dead.

Num 16:49 The number of people who died was 14,700, not counting those who died in Korah's rebellion.

Num 16:50 When the plague had stopped, Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance of the Tent.

Numbers 16:1-50

Numbers 16 - Korah's Rebellion

A. The battle lines are drawn: Korah and his followers oppose Moses' leadership.

1. (1-3) *The accusation against Moses and Aaron.*

Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"

a. **Now Korah the son of Izhar:** This rebellion, like all, had a leader and followers. This leader was **Korah**, descended from **Kohath**. Both Moses and Korah were

descended from Kohath, but by different sons (Moses through Amram [[Num 26:58-59](#)], and Korah through Izhar).

- i. The Kohathites had the most exalted duty among the Levites; their charge was to carry the most holy things of the temple, after Aaron and his sons had covered them with the specially prepared coverings ([Num 4:15](#)).
- ii. The name **Korah** means “baldness.” Old baldy was going to give Moses a tough time!

b. **You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy:** Korah was not content with what the LORD had called him to do in serving with the other Levites of the family of Kohath. He accused Moses of pride and exclusionary leadership.

- i. It was significant this accusation was made publicly, in front of **two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation... men of renown.** Men like Korah are always playing to an audience, always trying to draw a following after themselves - after Moses has already gathered the nation and led them this far, of course!

c. **You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them:** This was a clever attack. Korah acted as if he represented the people and fought for their interests. The truth was that he desired a following and a position for himself.

- i. “Moses, you shouldn’t be the leader. Let everyone be a leader. God can speak to everyone.” Rebels and divisive persons have always used such words for their cause.

ii. Significantly, Korah proclaimed the holiness of the people (**all the congregation is holy**) and regarded strong leadership as unnecessary (**You take too much**) at the very time when the nation was not holy and desperately needed strong leadership! Korah, like many rebels and divisive persons, completely misread the state of the “flock” - because he was not a true shepherd.

d. **Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the LORD:** Korah accused Moses (and Aaron) of pride and self-seeking. The truth was that Moses had not aspired to his position, that God had indeed called him, and Moses did not in fact see himself as above the congregation.

e. **Two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown:** On a human level, Korah was successful because these followed him. The “Korahs” of the ministry are difficult enough to deal with, but the people who follow them - the **two hundred and fifty leaders... representatives... men of renown** - who lack the discernment to oppose the “Korahs” can be even more painful.

2. (4-11) *The response of Moses to Korah and his company.*

So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face; and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, “Tomorrow morning the LORD will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him. Do this: Take censers, Korah and all your company; put fire in them and put incense in them before the LORD tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the LORD chooses is the holy one. You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!”

Then Moses said to Korah, “Hear now, you sons of Levi: Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also? Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the LORD. And what is Aaron that you complain against him?”

- a. **When Moses heard it, he fell on his face:** Moses first prayed. Being a humble man, he probably asked God if his critics were right or had something to teach him. He probably asked God what should be done in the situation. He certainly asked God to spare the nation and he asked God to not allow these divisive men to bring permanent harm to the people of God.
- b. **And he spoke to Korah and all his company:** We don't know how long Moses prayed, but after prayer he had a sense of God's direction for this crisis. He issued a challenge whereby Korah and his followers would come before the LORD, and Moses and Aaron would also come, so that the LORD would choose His leaders.
- c. **You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!** This shows that Moses did not doubt the outcome of the test. He knew that God would prove him right and Korah wrong. Therefore, Moses was unafraid to put it to the test.
- d. **Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel:** Moses knew that the rebellion of Korah was rooted in *ingratitude*. They were not thankful for the wonderful

ministry God gave them to do. He rebuked the pride and self-seeking that prompted their challenge.

i. Even if Korah was right, this was the wrong way to approach the problem. A power play like this was the wrong way to remove a leader like Moses. The methods of Korah (his use of accusation, intimidation, the gathering of a rival following) revealed his rebellious, divisive heart.

3. (12-14) *Dathan and Abiram speak for the rebels.*

And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, but they said, "We will not come up! "Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you should keep acting like a prince over us? Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!"

a. **Dathan and Abiram:** These were co-conspirators with Korah (16:1). They would not even meet with Moses, nor answer his challenge. They chose to accuse Moses instead.

b. **Out of a land of milk and honey:** This shows that Dathan and Abiram *colored the past*. They thought of *Egypt* as a land of milk and honey, even for the Hebrew slaves. Rebels and divisive people commonly create a past of their own preference, a past that puts leaders like Moses in the worst possible light.

c. **To kill us in the wilderness:** This shows that Dathan and Abiram *assigned an evil heart* to Moses. They spoke as if they had discovered the plot of Moses and Aaron: To lead the nation into the wilderness and then kill them. The foolishness of this shows how, against all reason,

rebels and divisive people often assign every evil intention to the heart of leaders like Moses.

d. **That you should keep acting like a prince over us:** This shows that Dathan and Abiram *refused to acknowledge growth* in Moses. It was true that Moses was at one time a prince, a self-confident man who thought he could deliver and lead Israel with his own hand. God broke him of that with forty years of leading another man's flock in the wilderness. Yet Dathan and Abiram threw it back in his face, as if God had never dealt with Moses in these areas.

e. **You have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey:** This shows that Dathan and Abiram *had unfair expectation* of Moses. It was true that Moses had not yet brought them to the Promised Land, and it was true that some of the blame must lay at the feet of Moses because he agreed to the demand of the people to send spies into the Promised Land (Deu 1:19-23). Yet, it is wrong to wholly blame Moses for this, or to think that Korah could have done any better.

i. It is unbelievably easy for the Korahs of this world to sit back and say, "If I was leading the nation at Kadesh Barnea, I would have done thus and so." But Korah was not leading the nation, and men of his type rarely do. God rarely puts the Monday-morning quarterbacks, the backseat drivers, in positions of real leadership - except as a chastisement, to show them just how difficult leadership really is - and that perfect leadership, like perfect anything, is impossible.

ii. Leaders should expect to be held to a higher standard; but it is patently unfair to hold a leader to a perfect standard.

f. **We will not come up:** This shows that Dathan and Abiram *considered themselves under no authority*. It

said, loud and clear: "Moses, we have no respect for your authority. We will listen to God, but not to you. Your word means nothing to us." They simply would not submit.

g. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up: Perhaps Dathan and Abiram did not speak for all of the 250 leaders, representatives, and men of renown. Yet none of those 250 were heard to raise an opposing voice to their harsh accusations.

i. Some of the 250 thought that maybe Dathan and Abiram were going a little far; but they did not have their courage to speak up. They were wrong because they allowed Moses to be accused this way with no one to defend him.

ii. It was easy for them to stand back and say, "Well, I won't take sides. I can be friends to both groups." But here and in many subsequent conflicts, silence is taken as agreement. If a godly man or woman - especially a leader - is being falsely accused, and you say nothing, you have sinned, because your silence is received as agreement.

4. (15-19a) Moses restates his challenge.

Then Moses was very angry, and said to the LORD, "Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them." And Moses said to Korah, "Tomorrow, you and all your company be present before the LORD; you and they, as well as Aaron. Let each take his censer and put incense in it, and each of you bring his censer before the LORD, two hundred and fifty censers; both you and Aaron, each *with* his censer." So every man took his censer, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and stood at the door of the tabernacle of meeting with Moses

and Aaron. And Korah gathered all the congregation against them at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

a. **Then Moses was very angry, and said to the**

LORD: After the words of Dathan and Abiram, Moses was angry - **very angry**. He knew he has done nothing to deserve such an accusation, and he did the right thing - he left the situation to God.

i. Remember that Moses was, after all, a man of political power; it was certainly within his capability to have Korah and his followers (like Dathan and Abiram) arrested and/or executed. Instead, he left the situation to God.

ii. Sometimes people are offended that a man like Moses was **angry** with men like Dathan and Abiram. They think a gentle, easy love is the proper response. Such thinking is understandable, but wrong. Shepherds are gentle with wayward sheep who might injure themselves, but they are passionate against wolves who would injure the flock.

b. **I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them:** This shows that Moses was a man of integrity and service to the people. Moses could rest in his clean conscience before God.

i. This reminds us of Paul's testimony before the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 : *Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God... I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel... I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak* (Act 20:26-27; Act 20:33; Act 20:35). When a leader is troubled by rebellious and divisive persons, there is something glorious about a clean conscience.

c. **Let each take his censer and put incense in it, and each of you bring his censer before the LORD:**

This specified the challenge. God would approve or disapprove of these 250 men gathered with censers of incense before the door of the tabernacle.

i. God used the censers with fire and incense in this test for a good reason. A **censer** is a metal pot used to burn incense, and they were used in the priestly worship of God. Since Korah and his companions questioned Moses and Aaron's right to lead the nation and conduct the priesthood, each group would come to the LORD as worshipping priests - and God would show which group He accepted.

ii. Moses made the rebels take the position they desired - the position of priest. Often the best judgment on the divisive and rebellious is to let them lead.

iii. Humanly speaking, the odds were not good. It was Moses and Aaron stand alone against **all the congregation**. Yet God would make this choice, and not popular opinion.

B. God affirms Moses' leadership over the nation of Israel.

1. (19b-21) God announces judgment on the rebels.

Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation. And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment."

a. **Separate yourselves:** It is as if God said, "Moses and Aaron, will you please move away? I'm going to destroy all these rebels in an instant, and I don't want you to get hurt."

b. **That I may consume them in a moment:** God decided to make His choice immediately evident. Sometimes this is not the case when God deals with modern Korahs and their followers.

2. (22) *The intercession of Moses and Aaron for Korah and the rebels.*

Then they fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?"

a. **Then they fell on their faces:** This was amazing love from Moses and Aaron. Undoubtedly, one of God's reasons for allowing such a painful event in the life of Moses was that God wanted to see this kind love drawn out of Moses. Perhaps it was only the prayer of Moses and Aaron can spare the lives of these men who have tried to bring them down. Such love for the undeserving shows that Moses and Aaron were growing in love and being transformed into the image of Jesus - before Jesus ever walked the earth.

i. Again, the importance of prayer is emphasized. It seems as if there were no prayer, then the rebellious congregation would be destroyed. We should think that Moses' prayer was essential.

b. **Shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation:** Moses and Aaron saw right through it. Though many were involved (at least more than 250), one man was at the center of it all - Korah. His sin, his drawing of a group after himself, was the cause of all this mess.

3. (23-35) *God's judgment on the rebels.*

So the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.'" Then Moses rose and

went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. And he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins." So they got away from around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, with their wives, their sons, and their little children. And Moses said: "By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for *I have not done them* of my own will. If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, *then the LORD has not sent me*. But if the LORD creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LORD." Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all *their* goods. So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us up *also!*" And a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

- a. **The elders of Israel followed him:** This was glorious. God had appointed elders back in Num 10:16-30, in response to another attack on Moses' leadership. There, the elders were to be men with the same spirit and vision as Moses, men to help him bear the burden,

men to stand with Moses. Here they did exactly what God appointed them to do.

b. **Lest you should be consumed in all their sins:**

Moses, in response to God's command to get away from the tents of the leaders of the rebellion (Korah, Dathan, and Abiram), plead with the people to separate themselves from the divisive persons.

i. The same attitude should be among God's people today. They should stay away from divisive, argumentative, contentious people in the body of Christ. You don't want to be close to them if God should deal with them. A divisive, contentious man will influence you, and you do not want to be consumed in their sins.

ii. The New Testament also speaks along this same principle: *Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned. (Tit 3:10-11) Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. (Rom 16:17-18)*

iii. Remember a divisive, contentious person will never *claim* to be divisive and contentious - they always consider their work a noble cause. Therefore, Christians need some discernment and to look at what others *do*, not only at what they say.

c. **By this you shall know:** God gave Moses supernatural insight to know some special judgment (**a new thing**) was going to come upon Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. The earth would swallow them up, as evidence that these men **have rejected the LORD**.

d. **The ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up:** This was just the way Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were destroyed - along with their families.

i. We may be uneasy seeing the families destroyed also, but it clearly shows that the families of the rebellious, divisive, contentious people suffer also - often greatly.

e. **A fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men:** God had judgment reserved for those who walked in agreement with Korah, though not as horrific as the judgment Korah himself received. Their worship was not received.

4. (36-40) *A bronze covering for the altar.*

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, to pick up the censers out of the blaze, for they are holy, and scatter the fire some distance away. The censers of these men who sinned against their own souls, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar. Because they presented them before the LORD, therefore they are holy; and they shall be a sign to the children of Israel." So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burned up had presented, and they were hammered out as a covering on the altar, **to be a memorial to the children of Israel that no outsider, who is not a descendant of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the LORD, that he might not become like Korah and his companions, just as the LORD had said to him through Moses.**

a. **Pick up the censers out of the blaze, for they are holy... let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar:** The censers were beaten flat and used to cover the main altar of sacrifice. The censers

of the rebels were **holy** and preserved because even though Korah and his followers worshipped wrongly, they worshipped the right God.

- i. "Can you imagine the scene? True priests are picking among the bodies, charred flesh, stench, smoke, smoldering embers, and twisted parts. They are to make a count. There were 250 censers; not one is to be lost. Each one is recorded, each one cleansed, each one holy." (Allen)
- ii. In the end, each one of the 250 were identified completely with Korah. Perhaps that wasn't how they meant it. "Well, I don't agree with everything Korah says, but he's got some good points." But to God all those distinctions were lost. All the censers are hammered together, and collectively titled: **Korah and his companions.**

b. **Scatter the fire some distance away:** The fire was not holy and was to be scattered away. It was a strange fire - not acceptable to the LORD at all.

c. **They were hammered out as a covering on the altar, to be a memorial to the children of Israel:** The censers were thus memorialized and served as an important reminder. God appoints His leaders, and no one should be a divisive rebel like Korah.

- i. If Christians today encounter ungodly, divisive leadership they should do what the 250 followers of Korah did *not* do. The right thing to do is to, if possible, remove yourself from such leaders without becoming rebellious and divisive. If it isn't possible, leave it up to God to deal with it (as David allowed God to deal with Saul) instead of taking matters into his own hands.

ii. In the Hebrew edition of the Old Testament, Num 16:36 begins a new chapter (chapter 17).

C. The people murmur against Moses and Aaron.

1. (41) *The accusation is made: You have killed the people of the LORD.*

On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the LORD."

a. **On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron:** Poor Moses! He no doubt hoped that all the trouble was over when the rebels were judged. But now he had to deal with those who were sympathetic to the divisive people and who felt sorry for them.

b. **You have killed the people of the LORD:** Their accusation against Moses was absurd. Moses certainly did not kill them. When the earth opens up and swallows more than 250 people, it is evidently the hand of God, not of Moses.

2. (42-45) *The threat of judgment on the children of Israel for their sympathy for Korah.*

Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces.

a. **Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment:** God reacted the same way towards the sympathizers as He did towards Korah and his company. Evidently, these people deserve to be judged.

b. **And they fell on their faces:** This humble, desperate reaction showed that they took the threat of judgment seriously. They understood that it was no small thing to sympathize with a divisive, contentious person. God takes it seriously, and so should we.

3. (46-50) *Aaron's intercession stops the plague of judgment upon the children of Israel.*

So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. The plague has begun." Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped. Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident. So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped.

a. **Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them:** God had promised judgment in Num 16:45 (*that I may consume them in a moment*). Therefore, Moses told Aaron, as the high priest over God's people, to immediately offer incense to **make atonement** for the congregation.

b. **Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly:** Moses and Aaron might have had an interest in letting God consume all those who sympathized with those who rebelled against their leadership. Instead, out of love, they tried to stop the plague.

- i. We have no reason to think that Korah or his group would have shown the same mercy to Moses. They probably would have passively said, "Well God, go ahead and give them what they deserve. I knew they had it coming to them!" Korah and the complainers didn't have the same shepherd's heart for Israel that Moses and Aaron did.
- ii. Aaron **ran into the midst of the congregation;** his sense of urgency is characteristic of true intercession.

c. **So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people:** A censer filled with burning incense was used to stop the plague. Incense is a picture of prayer in the Bible (as in Rev 8:3-4), because the sweet-smelling smoke of incense ascends to heaven as our prayers would. This was a dramatic picture of Aaron, as high priest, interceding for God's people.

d. **And he stood between the dead and the living, so the plague was stopped:** The plague stopped where Aaron prayed. Intercessors do the same thing today; they stand between the dead and the living, beseeching God's mercy, preserving and promoting life with their prayer.

- i. To stand **between the dead and the living** speaks of how *serious* the matter of prayer is; it is no casual pursuit, no fatalistic exercise in self-improvement. Prayer moves the hand of God and moves it to stop death and to give life!

ii. When was the last time we prayed as if life and death depended upon it?

e. **Those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred:** This is a great number, but not compared to the consuming of the whole nation. Even now, the generation of unbelief was perishing in the wilderness, so a new generation of faith and boldness could be raised up to take the Promised Land.

i. Most importantly, Aaron the high priest's work here is a picture of our high priest Jesus, and his work on our behalf. We were guilty sinners deserving judgment, we were rightly plagued, our Savior was sent on His mission, He was unjustly accused and attacked, He prayed on our behalf, He "ran" to save us, He stood between death and life for us, and He is the only chance for salvation, being the dividing line between death and life.

ii. "Aaron wisely puts himself in the pathway of the plague. It came on, cutting down all before it, and there stood Aaron the interposer with arms outstretched and censer swinging towards the heaven, interposing himself between the darts of death and the people. 'If there be darts that must fly,' he seemed to say, 'let them pierce me; or let the incense shield both me and the people.'" (Spurgeon) There is nothing that can save the soul of man except Jesus Christ standing between that soul and the judgment of God.

iii. "If Aaron the high priest, with his censer and incense, could disarm the wrath of an insulted, angry Deity, so that a guilty people, who deserved nothing but destruction, should be spared; how much more effectual may we expect the great atonement to be which was made by the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom

Aaron was only the *type!* The *sacrifices* of living animals pointed out the *death* of Christ on the cross; the *incense*, his *intercession*. Through his *death* salvation is purchased for the world; by his *intercession* the offending children of men are spared." (Clarke)

Aaron's Staff Buds

Num 17:1 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 17:2 "Tell the people of Israel to give you twelve walking sticks, one from the leader of each tribe. Write each man's name on his stick

Num 17:3 and then write Aaron's name on the stick representing Levi. There will be one stick for each tribal leader.

Num 17:4 Take them to the Tent of my presence and put them in front of the Covenant Box, where I meet you.

Num 17:5 Then the stick of the man I have chosen will sprout. In this way I will put a stop to the constant complaining of these Israelites against you."

Num 17:6 So Moses spoke to the Israelites, and each of their leaders gave him a stick, one for each tribe, twelve in all, and Aaron's stick was put with them.

Num 17:7 Moses then put all the sticks in the Tent in front of the LORD's Covenant Box.

Num 17:8 The next day, when Moses went into the Tent, he saw that Aaron's stick, representing the tribe of Levi, had sprouted. It had budded, blossomed, and produced ripe almonds!

Num 17:9 Moses took all the sticks and showed them to the Israelites. They saw what had happened, and each leader took his own stick back.

Num 17:10 The LORD said to Moses, "Put Aaron's stick back in front of the Covenant Box. It is to be kept as a

warning to the rebel Israelites that they will die unless their complaining stops."

Num 17:11 Moses did as the LORD commanded.

Num 17:12 The people of Israel said to Moses, "Then that's the end of us!

Num 17:13 If anyone who even comes near the Tent must die, then we are all as good as dead!"

Numbers 17:1-13

Numbers 17 - The Budding of Aaron's Rod

A. The test commanded.

1. (1-3) *Gathering rods, identified with each tribe.*

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to the children of Israel, and get from them a rod from each father's house, all their leaders according to their fathers' houses; twelve rods. Write each man's name on his rod. And you shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi. For there shall be one rod for the head of each father's house."

a. **Get from them a rod from each father's house:** A **rod** was a symbol of authority, because shepherds would use a rod to guide and correct the sheep (Psa 23:4).

i. Moses, as a shepherd, had **a rod** in his hand when tending sheep in the wilderness (Exo 4:2); this rod later became known as *the rod of God* - a symbol of the authority God gave to Moses (Exo 4:20).

ii. This same **rod** demonstrated Moses' authority in action, by miraculously becoming a serpent, and then becoming a rod again (Exo 7:9-10), by turning the waters of the Nile into blood (Exo 7:17), by bringing forth plagues of frogs (Exo 8:5) lice (Exo 8:16-17), hail (Exo 9:23), and locusts (Exo 10:13); God

commanded Moses to raise the rod over the Red Sea when it was to be parted (Exo 14:16), the rod that was raised in prayer over Israel in victorious battle (Exo 17:9), the rod that struck the rock and brought forth water (Num 20:11); the rod is a picture of God's authority over man (Psa 2:9; Psa 23:4; Psa 89:32; Isa 10:24; Isa 11:4, Eze 20:37); Jesus, in His divine authority, is given the title "the Rod" (Isa 11:1; Mic 6:9); the rod is an emblem of an apostle's authority in the church (1Co 4:21).

b. **Write each man's name on his rod. And you shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi:** In gathering rods, and inscribing each with the name of a tribe, and on Levi's rod inscribing Aaron's name, God would declare which tribe possessed priestly authority by choosing one of the rods. This was the issue at hand in light of Korah's rebellion.

2. (4-5) *The rods to be placed in the tabernacle for God's choosing.*

"Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you. And it shall be that the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you."

a. **The rod of the man whom I choose will blossom:** Not only would this obviously be a miraculous sign; the blossoming of dead wood spoke of fruitfulness. Fruitfulness - miraculous fruitfulness - is present when godly authority and leadership is being practiced.

b. **Thus I will rid Myself of the murmurings:** This did not mean that after this, the children of Israel would never complain again. But God, having demonstrated more than sufficient evidence to the murmurers, would

no longer regard their murmuring. Indeed, He would then judge their murmuring.

i. Murmurers (complainers) are rarely satisfied by evidence or the resolution of one issue. Complainers are not issue-motivated, though they claim to be and appear to be; they are heart-motivated. They murmur because they have complaining, discontent hearts. The complaining heart is demonstrated when people murmur about one issue after another, never being satisfied.

ii. So, God will give them an unmistakable answer to this matter of contention - then **rid Himself of their murmurings.**

B. The test vindicates Aaron as God's priestly leader.

1. (6-7) *The rods are placed before the LORD in the tabernacle of witness.*

So Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and each of their leaders gave him a rod apiece, for each leader according to their fathers' houses, twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron was among their rods. And Moses placed the rods before the LORD in the tabernacle of witness.

2. (8-9) *The budding of Aaron's rod.*

Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds. Then Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD to all the children of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod.

a. **And behold, the rod of Aaron:** When Moses checked on the rods the next day, Aaron's rod - and only Aaron's rod - had **sprouted**. It not only sprouted, it had

put forth buds. It had not only put forth buds, it had **produced blossoms.** It had not only produced blossoms, it had **yielded... almonds.** It had not only yielded almonds, it yielded **ripe** almonds!

- i. This was a place where a "small" miracle would have been convincing. After all, God could have merely made a little green sprout come forth from Aaron's rod alone, and that would have - or should have - been enough.
- ii. But God gave, as in the words of Act 1:3, *many infallible proofs*, to demonstrate His approval of Aaron's leadership. God gives us *more* than enough evidence; our problem is a lack of willingness to see what He has made clear.
- iii. "We are probably to understand that some parts were in bud, other in bloom and others had fruited." (Wenham) Fruit from a godly leader may come in all different stages.
- iv. There is nothing remarkable about a piece of wood with buds, blossoms, or fruit on it. But a piece of dead wood with all these things appearing in one night after sitting in a tent is remarkable. "Miracles in the Bible are often of this sort: natural events in unnatural conditions, timing, and placement." (Allen)

b. **Behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted:** God's choice of Aaron's rod did not mean that Aaron was the most spiritual man in the nation. God's chosen leaders will have godly character according to the principles of 1Ti 3:1-13 and Tit 1:5-9, but it wasn't a contest to determine the most spiritual man among them.

- i. It also did not mean that Aaron *had* not and *would* not sin or fail significantly. God's chosen leaders may

fail (we do not believe in the Roman Catholic idea of “papal” or “pastoral” infallibility), but must set things right when they fail.

ii. It meant Aaron was God’s chosen priest, and the nation was required to recognize it.

c. **Each man took his rod:** This was a dramatic scene. Each murmurer from the different tribes took his rod, and clearly saw that his *had not* budded or borne fruit, and that Aaron’s had.

3. (10-11) *The command to preserve Aaron’s rod in the ark of the covenant.*

And the LORD said to Moses, “Bring Aaron’s rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die.” Thus did Moses; just as the LORD had commanded him, so he did.

a. **To be kept as a sign against the rebels:** The rod of Aaron was to be kept as a museum piece, to remind the children of Israel that God had chosen a priesthood, and nothing would change that - Aaron’s priesthood would always be Aaron’s priesthood.

i. If God demonstrated His choice of Aaron and his descendants as priests for Israel, how can Jesus be our high priest, as Heb 2:17 says? Because Jesus is a high priest of the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron (Hebrews 7).

b. **Bring Aaron’s rod back before the Testimony:** Aaron’s rod was to be kept in the ark of the covenant, as another example of Israel’s failure and rebellion. When God looked down from heaven into the ark, He saw emblems of Israel’s sin: The tablets of law they broke, the manna they complained about, and Aaron’s rod meant to answer their rebellion. The covering blood of

sacrifice was applied to the lid covering over these reminders of Israel's sin, so God "saw" the blood "covering" their sin, and atonement was made.

4. (12-13) *The reaction of the children of Israel.*

So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, "Surely we die, we perish, we all perish! Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the LORD must die. Shall we all utterly die?"

a. **Surely we die, we perish, we all perish:** This shows they the people of Israel were clearly convicted of their sin. They now clearly knew that it was wrong to rebel against the leadership of Aaron.

b. **Shall we all utterly die:** After seeing all what God did in the rebellion of Korah - destroying Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, along with their 250 followers among the leading men of Israel; the retrieval and hammering out of the censers for a covering on the altar; the plague destroying 14,700 of those who sympathized with Korah and his followers, and the miraculous confirmation of Aaron's priesthood - the people fear they are next to be judged, which was not an unreasonable fear.

i. This kind of hysterical fear doesn't necessarily mean their hearts were changed. This will not be the last account of a complaining, murmuring Israel. This shows that dramatic events don't take away our complaining and rebelliousness. The heart has to be changed by God.

Duties of Priests and Levites

Num 18:1 The LORD said to Aaron, "You, your sons, and the Levites must suffer the consequences of any guilt connected with serving in the Tent of my presence; but only you and your sons will suffer the consequences of service in the priesthood.

Num 18:2 Bring in your relatives, the tribe of Levi, to work with you and help you while you and your sons are serving at the Tent.

Num 18:3 They are to fulfill their duties to you and their responsibilities for the Tent, but they must not have any contact with sacred objects in the Holy Place or with the altar. If they do, both they and you will be put to death.

Num 18:4 They are to work with you and fulfill their responsibilities for all the service in the Tent, but no unqualified person may work with you.

Num 18:5 You and your sons alone must fulfill the responsibilities for the Holy Place and the altar, so that my anger will not again break out against the people of Israel.

Num 18:6 I am the one who has chosen your relatives the Levites from among the Israelites as a gift to you. They are dedicated to me, so that they can carry out their duties in the Tent.

Num 18:7 But you and your sons alone shall fulfill all the responsibilities of the priesthood that concern the altar and what is in the Most Holy Place. These things are your responsibility, because I have given you the gift of the priesthood. Any unqualified person who comes near the sacred objects shall be put to death."

Num 18:8 The LORD said to Aaron, "Remember that I am giving you all the special contributions made to me that are not burned as sacrifices. I am giving them to you and to your descendants as the part assigned to you forever.

Num 18:9 Of the most sacred offerings not burned on the altar, the following belong to you: the grain offerings, the sin offerings, and the repayment offerings. Everything that is presented to me as a sacred offering belongs to you and your sons.

Num 18:10 You must eat these things in a holy place, and only males may eat them; consider them holy.

Num 18:11 "In addition, any other special contributions that the Israelites present to me shall be yours. I am giving them to you, your sons, and your daughters for all time to come. Every member of your family who is ritually clean may eat them.

Num 18:12 "I am giving you all the best of the first produce which the Israelites give me each year: olive oil, wine, and grain.

Num 18:13 It all belongs to you. Every member of your family who is ritually clean may eat it.

Num 18:14 "Everything in Israel that has been unconditionally dedicated to me belongs to you.

Num 18:15 "Every first-born child or animal that the Israelites present to me belongs to you. But you must accept payment to buy back every first-born child, and must also accept payment for every first-born animal that is ritually unclean.

Num 18:16 Children shall be bought back at the age of one month for the fixed price of five pieces of silver, according to the official standard.

Num 18:17 But the first-born of cows, sheep, and goats are not to be bought back; they belong completely to me and are to be sacrificed. Throw their blood against the altar and burn their fat as a food offering, an odor pleasing to me.

Num 18:18 The meat from them belongs to you, like the breast and the right hind leg of the special offering.

Num 18:19 "I am giving to you, to your sons, and to your daughters, for all time to come, all the special contributions which the Israelites present to me. This is an unbreakable covenant that I have made with you and your descendants."

Num 18:20 The LORD said to Aaron, "You will not receive any property that can be inherited, and no part of the land

of Israel will be assigned to you. I, the LORD, am all you need."

Num 18:21 The LORD said, "I have given to the Levites every tithe that the people of Israel present to me. This is in payment for their service in taking care of the Tent of my presence.

Num 18:22 The other Israelites must no longer approach the Tent and in this way bring on themselves the penalty of death.

Num 18:23 From now on only the Levites will take care of the Tent and bear the full responsibility for it. This is a permanent rule that applies also to your descendants. The Levites shall have no permanent property in Israel,

Num 18:24 because I have given to them as their possession the tithe which the Israelites present to me as a special contribution. That is why I told them that they would have no permanent property in Israel."

Num 18:25 The LORD commanded Moses

Num 18:26 to say to the Levites: "When you receive from the Israelites the tithe that the LORD gives you as your possession, you must present a tenth of it as a special contribution to the LORD.

Num 18:27 This special contribution will be considered as the equivalent of the offering which the farmer makes of new grain and new wine.

Num 18:28 In this way you also will present the special contribution that belongs to the LORD from all the tithes which you receive from the Israelites. You are to give this special contribution for the LORD to Aaron the priest.

Num 18:29 Give it from the best that you receive.

Num 18:30 When you have presented the best part, you may keep the rest, just as the farmer keeps what is left after he makes his offering.

Num 18:31 You and your families may eat the rest anywhere, because it is your wages for your service in the Tent.

Num 18:32 You will not become guilty when you eat it, as long as you have presented the best of it to the LORD. But be sure not to profane the sacred gifts of the Israelites by eating any of the gifts before the best part is offered; if you do, you will be put to death."

Numbers 18:1-32

Numbers 18 - Laws Pertaining to Priests and Levites

A. Responsibilities of the priests and the Levites.

1. (1) The priests are accountable for the sanctuary and the priesthood.

Then the LORD said to Aaron: "You and your sons and your father's house with you shall bear the iniquity related to the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity associated with your priesthood.

a. **You and your sons and your father's house:** The priests - that is, Aaron, his sons, and their descendants - **shall bear the iniquity related to the sanctuary**, and the priesthood. They were accountable to God.

b. **You shall bear the iniquity:** This is the other side of Aaron's prerogative as the chosen priest of God, as demonstrated with the budding of the rod in chapter 17. Moses had authority from God; but he also had accountability.

i. God *never* gives authority without accountability; the two always go together. If God gives someone headship and expects others to submit to them in His order, God also has a special accountability for that person.

2. (2-7) *The Levites are God's chosen helpers for the priests in their ministry at the altar and tabernacle.*

"Also bring with you your brethren of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may be joined with you and serve you while you and your sons are with you before the tabernacle of witness. They shall attend to your needs and all the needs of the tabernacle; but they shall not come near the articles of the sanctuary and the altar, lest they die; they and you also. They shall be joined with you and attend to the needs of the tabernacle of meeting, for all the work of the tabernacle; but an outsider shall not come near you. And you shall attend to the duties of the sanctuary and the duties of the altar, that there may be no more wrath on the children of Israel. Behold, I Myself have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel; they are a gift to you, given by the LORD, to do the work of the tabernacle of meeting. Therefore you and your sons with you shall attend to your priesthood for everything at the altar and behind the veil; and you shall serve. I give your priesthood to you as a gift for service, but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death."

a. Bring with you your brethren of the tribe of Levi:

Aaron himself was of the tribe of Levi. While only he and his descendants were given the priesthood, the whole tribe of Levi had a special calling to help Aaron and the priests.

b. That they may be joined with you and serve you:

The Levites were the support people for the ministry of the priests. They didn't have the prominent position but were important for their behind-the-scenes service.

c. They shall not come near the articles of the sanctuary and the altar: The Levites were not allowed to do what the priests did. In the same way, the New Testament says we are all different “parts” of the body, each with particular gifts and callings (1Co 12:4-7).

B. The privileges of the priests and the Levites.

1. (8-20) The firstborn and the devoted portions belong to the priest.

And the LORD spoke to Aaron: “Here, I Myself have also given you charge of My heave offerings, all the holy gifts of the children of Israel; I have given them as a portion to you and your sons, as an ordinance forever. This shall be yours of the most holy things reserved from the fire: every offering of theirs, every grain offering and every sin offering and every trespass offering which they render to Me, shall be most holy for you and your sons. In a most holy place you shall eat it; every male shall eat it. It shall be holy to you. This also is yours: the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel; I have given them to you, and your sons and daughters with you, as an ordinance forever. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it. All the best of the oil, all the best of the new wine and the grain, their firstfruits which they offer to the LORD, I have given them to you. Whatever first ripe fruit is in their land, which they bring to the LORD, shall be yours. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it. Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours. Everything that first opens the womb of all flesh, which they bring to the LORD, whether man or beast, shall be yours; nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. And those

redeemed of the devoted things you shall redeem when one month old, according to your valuation, for five shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which *is* twenty gerahs. But the firstborn of a cow, the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat you shall not redeem; they are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar, and burn their fat as an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the LORD. And their flesh shall be yours, just as the wave breast and the right thigh are yours. All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer to the LORD, I have given to you and your sons and daughters with you as an ordinance forever; it *is* a covenant of salt forever before the LORD with you and your descendants with you.” Then the LORD said to Aaron: “You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel.”

a. **Here, I Myself have also given you charge of My heave offerings:** The **heave offerings** were brought to God as part of the peace offering (Exo 29:28, Lev 7:14), a Nazirite’s consecration offering (Num 6:20), and for thanksgiving (Num 15:19-21). In the heave offering, a choice portion of the animal (the breast or the thigh) was *heaved* or *waved* before the LORD.

i. Afterwards, that choice portion of the meat was for the priest and his family and was considered holy - so it had to be eaten in the *holy place*.

b. **Every offering of theirs:** The priest also received portions from the **grain offering** and **sin offering** and **trespass offering**; gifts of **oil**, **wine**, and **grain**, and **ripe fruit** from the firstfruits offerings were also to be

given to the priests. This was how the priesthood was supported in Israel.

c. **Everything that first opens the womb of all flesh:**

When the firstborn was brought to the tabernacle, either to be given or redeemed with money, it also belonged to the priest.

d. **I have given to you and your sons and daughters with you as an ordinance forever:** All of these belonged to the priests, and it was vitally important the children of Israel fulfill their obligation to bring these things - God calls it **a covenant of salt forever**.

i. Salt speaks of purity, of preservation, and of expense. So, a covenant of salt is a *pure* covenant (salt stays a pure chemical compound), a covenant of salt is an *enduring* covenant (salt makes things preserve and endure), and a covenant of salt is a *valuable* covenant (salt was expensive).

ii. Spurgeon on the **covenant of salt**: "By which was meant that it was an unchangeable, incorruptible covenant, which would endure as salt makes a thing to endure, so that it is not liable to putrefy or corrupt."

iii. According to custom, a bond of friendship was established through the eating of salt. It was said that once you had eaten a man's salt, you were his friend for life.

e. **You shall have no inheritance in their land:** While the priests had the right to receive much, he also was deprived of **inheritance in their land**; they had no permanent portion of land given to them, because God said **I am your portion and your inheritance**.

i. What a precious place, to say "the LORD is my portion!" *O LORD, You are the portion of my*

inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot (Psa 16:5). My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever (Psa 73:26). I cried out to You, O LORD: I said, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living" (Psa 142:5).

ii. When God is our portion, He is our inheritance - our hope, who we trust for our future. We are satisfied in Him. Since we are all a royal priesthood (1Pe 2:9), we all have the LORD for our portion.

2. (21-24) *Tithes given to the Levites.*

"Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting. Hereafter the children of Israel shall not come near the tabernacle of meeting, lest they bear sin and die. But the Levites shall perform the work of the tabernacle of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a statute forever, throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance. For the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up as a heave offering to the LORD, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, 'Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.'"

a. **I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel:** God commanded the tithes (a giving of ten percent of one's income) be given to the Levites for their support. The tithes *belong* to God (He says **I have given**, so they are His to give), but He gives them to the Levites.

i. When an Israelite was not giving their tithe, they were not robbing the Levite - though the money ended up with them. They were robbing God

(Mal 3:8-10), because God received the tithe from the giver, and He gave it to the Levite.

ii. Some today think the tithe, since it went to support the Levites (who were, in a sense, government workers in ancient Israel), is covered by government taxes of today, and that free-will giving mentioned in the Old Testament answers to the New Testament emphasis on giving. We can say that the New Testament nowhere specifically commands tithing, but it certainly does speak of it in a positive light if it is done with a right heart (Luk 11:42).

iii. It is also important to understand that tithing is not a principle dependent on the Mosaic law; as

Heb 7:5-9 explains, tithing was practiced and honored by God before the law of Moses.

iv. What the New Testament does speak with great clarity on is the principle of giving; that giving should be regular, planned, proportional, and private (1Co 16:1-4); that it must be generous, freely given, and cheerful (2 Corinthians 9).

v. Since the New Testament doesn't emphasize tithing, one might not be strict on it for Christians (though some Christians do argue against tithing on the basis of self-interest); but since giving is to be proportional, we should be giving *some* percentage - and ten percent is a good benchmark - and starting place! For some to give ten percent is nowhere near enough; for others, at their present time, five percent may be a massive step of faith.

vi. If our question is, "How little can I give and still be pleasing to God?" our heart isn't in the right place at all. We should have the attitude of some early Christians, who essentially said: "We're not under the

tithe - we can give *more!*" Giving and financial management is a *spiritual* issue, not just a financial one (Luk 16:11).

b. **In return for the work which they perform:** The tithes were also given by God as pay to the Levites, not as gifts. Because the Levites had dedicated themselves to the service of God, the people of God, and the things of God, it was right they be supported by God - through the tithes of the children of Israel.

i. **In return for the work which they perform** means the Levites had the "right" to expect to be supported through the tithe. Paul presents the same principle for ministers of the gospel in the New Testament (1Co 9:7-14); yet also shows that when it is better for the gospel, the right should be willingly laid down for God's glory (1Co 9:15).

ii. However, once every three years, the tithe was collected and distributed not only to the Levites, but also to the poor and needy among Israel (Deu 14:28-29).

c. **The Levites shall perform the work of the tabernacle of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity:** This shows that the Levites also had a special responsibility. If they were to be supported through the tithe, they had to do the job, and do it with diligence.

i. There are probably few things worse than one supported through the gifts of God's people who is lazy at his job; if a man is robbing his employer by laziness, how much more a minister of the gospel.

d. **Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance:** Just as with the priests, it was a trade-off. The Levites did not have the best of both worlds; they

did not have a personal inheritance of land as the other tribes did.

i. Those who are supported through the giving of God's people should expect that they would not have the best of both worlds; they will not be wealthy in this life, though they should be comfortable. It is wrong for the congregation to keep the pastor "humble" through poverty, and just as wrong for the pastor to be using the gifts of God's people to live above God's people.

3. (25-32) *The Levites tithe to the priests.*

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak thus to the Levites, and say to them: 'When you take from the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to the LORD, a tenth of the tithe. And your heave offering shall be reckoned to you as though *it were* the grain of the threshing floor and as the fullness of the winepress. Thus you shall also offer a heave offering to the LORD from all your tithes which you receive from the children of Israel, and you shall give the LORD's heave offering from it to Aaron the priest. Of all your gifts you shall offer up every heave offering due to the LORD, from all the best of them, the consecrated part of them.' Therefore you shall say to them: 'When you have lifted up the best of it, then *the rest* shall be accounted to the Levites as the produce of the threshing floor and as the produce of the winepress. You may eat it in any place, you and your households, for it *is* your reward for your work in the tabernacle of meeting. And you shall bear no sin because of it, when you have lifted up the best of it. But you shall

not profane the holy gifts of the children of Israel, lest you die.”

a. **A tenth of the tithe:** The Levites themselves were not exempt from tithing. They were also to give a tenth (and the **best of them** given as the tenth) **due to the LORD**, and the LORD gave it to the priests.

i. It was important for the Levites to learn how to be givers also; just because they were supported through the giving of God’s people, it did not mean they didn’t need to give. We all need to learn how to be givers, because God is a giver, and we are being transformed into the image of Jesus.

b. **Of all your gifts you shall offer up every heave offering due to the LORD:** We are not told if the priests were to tithe from what they received; presumably they did not - because what belonged to the priests was considered holy, and not to be used by others outside the priestly families.

i. This chapter clearly shows that the obligation of the Israelite to give was far more than just the tithe (the giving of ten percent); the Israelite also had to give *firstfruits* (Num 18:12) of all their produce and the *firstborn* (Num 18:15) of their flocks and herds, portions of each that went to the priests and/or Levites.

ii. Firstborn and firstfruits were “risky” giving; your land might not yield much more produce, and your cow or ewe might not give birth again - yet the first still belonged to God, and was given to the priests. God promised to bless this giving of the firstfruits and firstborn in faith: *Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.* (Pro 3:9-10)

iii. This wasn't the end of Israel's required giving; they were also told to leave a portion of their fields unharvested so the poor could eat from those portions (Lev 19:9-10), a Passover sacrifice was required from each family every year (Exo 12:43-47), sometimes a temple tax was required (Neh 10:32-33), or a special tribute (Num 32:28-29).

iv. It is hard to estimate exactly how much the firstfruits and firstborn obligations amounted to; it would differ from family to family. But the actual required giving of Israel was far more than ten percent (the tithe).

v. Some say that Deu 12:6 speaks of another ten percent given (sometimes called the "festival tithe"), but in context Deuteronomy 12 is only speaking of where to bring the tithe, not commanding an additional one to be brought; others have said Deu 14:28-29 speaks of another tithe (sometimes called the "poor tithe") to be brought every three years, but since it speaks of *the tithe*, and since it also goes to the Levite and not just to the poor, it is best to understand that this is not an additional tithe, but a command that once every three years the tithe also be available to the poor, not just to the Levite.

vi. Besides the required giving, Israel was asked to give free-will offerings: This chapter speaks of willingly given sacrifices, of which the heave offering went to the priests (Num 18:9-11).

vii. This wasn't the end of Israel's voluntary giving; they also were asked to give for special projects (like the building of the tabernacle, Exo 35:4-9), and free-will giving to the poor.

Laws for Purification

Num 19:1 The LORD commanded Moses and Aaron

Num 19:2 to give the Israelites the following regulations. Bring to Moses and Aaron a red cow which has no defects and which has never been worked,

Num 19:3 and they will give it to Eleazar the priest. It is to be taken outside the camp and killed in his presence.

Num 19:4 Then Eleazar is to take some of its blood and with his finger sprinkle it seven times in the direction of the Tent.

Num 19:5 The whole animal, including skin, meat, blood, and intestines, is to be burned in the presence of the priest.

Num 19:6 Then he is to take some cedar wood, a sprig of hyssop, and a red cord and throw them into the fire.

Num 19:7 After that, he is to wash his clothes and pour water over himself, and then he may enter the camp; but he remains ritually unclean until evening.

Num 19:8 The one who burned the cow must also wash his clothes and pour water over himself, but he also remains unclean until evening.

Num 19:9 Then someone who is ritually clean is to collect the ashes of the cow and put them in a ritually clean place outside the camp, where they are to be kept for the Israelite community to use in preparing the water for removing ritual uncleanness. This ritual is performed to remove sin.

Num 19:10 The one who collected the ashes must wash his clothes, but he remains unclean until evening. This regulation is valid for all time to come, both for the Israelites and for the foreigners living among them.

Num 19:11 Those who touch a corpse are ritually unclean for seven days.

Num 19:12 They must purify themselves with the water for purification on the third day and on the seventh day, and then they will be clean. But if they do not purify themselves

on both the third and the seventh day, they will not be clean.

Num 19:13 Those who touch a corpse and do not purify themselves remain unclean, because the water for purification has not been thrown over them. They defile the LORD's Tent, and they will no longer be considered God's people.

Num 19:14 In the case of a person who dies in a tent, anyone who is in the tent at the time of death or who enters it becomes ritually unclean for seven days.

Num 19:15 Every jar and pot in the tent that has no lid on it also becomes unclean.

Num 19:16 If any touch a person who has been killed or has died a natural death outdoors or if any touch a human bone or a grave, they become unclean for seven days.

Num 19:17 To remove the uncleanness, some ashes from the red cow which was burned to remove sin shall be taken and put in a pot, and fresh water added.

Num 19:18 In the first case, someone who is ritually clean is to take a sprig of hyssop, dip it in the water, and sprinkle the tent, everything in it, and the people who were there. In the second case, someone who is ritually clean is to sprinkle the water on those who had touched the human bone or the dead body or the grave.

Num 19:19 On the third day and on the seventh the person who is ritually clean is to sprinkle the water on the unclean persons. On the seventh day he is to purify those, who, after washing their clothes and pouring water over themselves, become ritually clean at sunset.

Num 19:20 Those who have become ritually unclean and do not purify themselves remain unclean, because the water for purification has not been thrown over them. They defile the LORD's Tent and will no longer be considered God's people.

Num 19:21 You are to observe this rule for all time to come. The person who sprinkles the water for purification must also wash his clothes; anyone who touches the water remains ritually unclean until evening.

Num 19:22 Whatever an unclean person touches is unclean, and anyone else who touches it remains unclean until evening.

Numbers 19:1-22

Numbers 19 - Laws of Purification

A. Provision for purification – the ashes from the sacrifice of a red heifer.

*1. (1-2) The taking of a **red heifer**.*

Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, “This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD has commanded, saying: ‘Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which a yoke has never come.’”

a. **That they bring you a red heifer:** A **heifer** is a cow which has never been pregnant, and thus cannot yet give milk. They had to find one with a **red** color - which, of course, would be somewhat rare.

i. “Normally the animal’s colour did not matter. This one had to be red to resemble blood.” (Wenham)

b. **Without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which a yoke has never come:** These requirements made this particular animal even rarer. This red heifer, therefore, would be valuable, rare, and pure (because she had not yet been impregnated).

2. (3-10) The sacrifice, burning, and gathering of ashes from the red heifer.

You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, that he may take it outside the camp, and it shall be slaughtered before him; and Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, and sprinkle some of its blood seven times directly in front of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight: its hide, its flesh, its blood, and its offal shall be burned. And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet, and cast *them* into the midst of the fire burning the heifer. Then the priest shall wash his clothes, he shall bathe in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp; the priest shall be unclean until evening. And the one who burns it shall wash his clothes in water, bathe in water, and shall be unclean until evening. Then a man *who is* clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and store *them* outside the camp in a clean place; and they shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for the water of purification; it *is* for purifying from sin. And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until evening. It shall be a statute forever to the children of Israel and to the stranger who dwells among them.

a. **Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight: its hide, its flesh, its blood, and its offal shall be burned:** The red heifer would be sacrificed in the customary fashion, with a bit of blood being sprinkled on the altar. Yet, the complete carcass of the animal was burnt, and the ashes gathered by one observing the cleansing ceremonies before and after the gathering of ashes.

i. **Its blood... shall be burned:** Unlike every other sacrifice in the Old Testament, the blood of the red heifer is burnt along with the sacrifice, instead of being completely drained out at the jugular. Blood

was to be part of the ashes that would come forth from the burning of the carcass of the red heifer.

b. **And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet, and cast them into the midst of the fire burning the heifer:** When the heifer was burnt, the priest would also put **cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet** into the fire.

i. In Lev 14:4-6, each of these three items are used in the cleansing ceremony for a leper. Each of these items has a special significance.

ii. Cedar is extremely resistant to disease and rot and is well known for its quality and preciousness. These properties may be the reason for including it here - as well as a symbolic reference to the wood of the cross. Some even think the cross Jesus was crucified on was made of cedar.

iii. Hyssop was used not only with the cleansing ceremony for lepers, but also Jesus was offered drink from a hyssop branch on the cross (Mat 27:48), and when David said *purge me with hyssop* in Psa 51:7, he was admitted he was as bad as a leper.

iv. Scarlet, the color of blood, pictures the cleansing blood of Jesus on the cross. Scarlet was used in the veil and curtains of the tabernacle (Exo 26:31), in the garments of the high priest (Exo 28:5-6), the covering for the table of showbread (Num 4:8), the sign of Rahab's salvation (Jos 2:21), and the color of the mocking "king's robe" put on Jesus at His torture by the soldiers (Mat 27:28).

c. **They shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for the water of purification; it is for purifying from sin:** The residue from the burning of the carcass, the cedar, the hyssop, and the scarlet fabric

together would produce a lot of ash, and the ash was to be gathered and sprinkled in water bit by bit to make water fit for purification.

B. Other laws of purification.

1. (11-13) Touching dead bodies makes one ceremonially unclean.

He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean. Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD. That person shall be cut off from Israel. He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness is still on him.

a. **He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days:** To be ceremonially unclean was not “sin,” as we might think of it; it meant that one was barred from their regular fellowship with and worship of God, and their fellowship with God’s people, until they were made clean.

b. **I he does not purify himself... that person shall be cut off:** One who was unclean needed purification, and could not ignore their condition, but was still part of the nation - unless they refused to correct their unclean condition.

i. A wonderful parallel is found in Joh 13:5-11; if we are “bathed” by Jesus, we need only to have our feet washed, as they become unclean in the normal practice of life. Yet, if we do not let Jesus “wash” us, we have no part with Him. We must receive the

beautiful once-for-all cleansing Jesus brings to us when we are born again; yet continually come to Him to be cleansed of the "day-to-day" things.

c. **Defiles the tabernacle of the LORD:** These laws were relevant to all in Israel, but especially to priests, who had the potential to defile the tabernacle of the LORD. Under the New Covenant, the Christian also has a special call to purity because we can also defile the dwelling place of God (1Co 6:19-20).

2. (14-16) *How to handle a dead body.*

This is the law when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who are in the tent shall be unclean seven days; and every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, is unclean. Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.

a. **This is the law when a man dies in a tent:** The practice of quarantining all those who come into contact with a dead body was a wonderful public health measure as well. Those potentially contaminated would be set aside until it could be seen if they contracted a disease from the dead body.

b. **Every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, is unclean:** In fact, this principle extended to **every open vessel** - which could potentially harbor disease causing organisms. If near a dead body, those vessels would be declared unclean and thus destroyed, reducing the danger of communicable disease.

c. **Shall be unclean:** What was inherently unclean about a dead body? Simply that death is the result and positive proof of sin (Gen 2:15-17, Rom 5:12). Death is like sin made visible.

- i. If someone touched the carcass of a dead animal, he was unclean for less than one day (Lev 11:24; Lev 11:27; Lev 11:39). But if one touched a dead human, he was unclean for seven days! Man is indeed greater than the animals - especially greater in sin.
- ii. Our contact with a dead body also makes us unclean. In Rom 7:24, Paul cries out in frustration of defeat in sin: *Who will deliver me from this body of death?* We can only be delivered from the body of death if we receive and walk in the precious work of Jesus on our behalf.

3. (17-19) *The purpose for the ashes of the red heifer.*

And for an unclean person they shall take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, and running water shall be put on them in a vessel. A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, sprinkle it on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave. The clean person shall sprinkle the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean.

- a. **They shall take some of the ashes of the heifer:** The ashes of the red heifer, described earlier in the chapter, were sprinkled in fresh water, and this water was used for purification.
- b. **And at evening he shall be clean:** Thus, ashes of the red heifer (which the ingredients all speak of the work of Jesus on our behalf), combined with water (which speaks of the work of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit) combine together to bring cleansing. It can cleanse even the uncleanness brought about by death.

i. All this cleansing is a precious picture; but the reality is in Jesus: *For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb 9:13-14)*

4. (20-22) *The nature of uncleanness.*

But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD. The water of purification has not been sprinkled on him; he is unclean. It shall be a perpetual statute for them. He who sprinkles the water of purification shall wash his clothes; and he who touches the water of purification shall be unclean until evening. Whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean; and the person who touches it shall be unclean until evening.

a. **The man who is unclean and does not purify himself:** This shows that uncleanness cannot correct itself. The unclean man will not just become clean. He must do something, and he must do what God says must be done in order to be clean. His own plans or schemes for cleansing mean nothing.

b. **He who sprinkles the water of purification:** Those who help others to become clean must walk in cleanness themselves. The one who regards the water of cleansing as a common thing (**he who touches the water of purification**) will himself be regarded as unclean.

c. **Whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean:** Uncleanness was easily transmitted, but cleanness had to be deliberately sought.

The Death of Miriam

Num 20:1 In the first month the whole community of Israel came to the wilderness of Zin and camped at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried.

The Waters of Meribah

Num 20:2 There was no water where they camped, so the people gathered around Moses and Aaron

Num 20:3 and complained: "It would have been better if we had died in front of the LORD's Tent along with the other Israelites.

Num 20:4 Why have you brought us out into this wilderness? Just so that we can die here with our animals?

Num 20:5 Why did you bring us out of Egypt into this miserable place where nothing will grow? There's no grain, no figs, no grapes, no pomegranates. There is not even any water to drink!"

Num 20:6 Moses and Aaron moved away from the people and stood at the entrance of the Tent. They bowed down with their faces to the ground, and the dazzling light of the LORD's presence appeared to them.

Num 20:7 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 20:8 "Take the stick that is in front of the Covenant Box, and then you and Aaron assemble the whole community. There in front of them all speak to that rock over there, and water will gush out of it. In this way you will bring water out of the rock for the people, for them and their animals to drink."

Num 20:9 Moses went and got the stick, as the LORD had commanded.

Moses Strikes the Rock

Num 20:10 He and Aaron assembled the whole community in front of the rock, and Moses said, "Listen, you rebels! Do

we have to get water out of this rock for you?"

Num 20:11 Then Moses raised the stick and struck the rock twice with it, and a great stream of water gushed out, and all the people and animals drank.

Num 20:12 But the LORD reprimanded Moses and Aaron. He said, "Because you did not have enough faith to acknowledge my holy power before the people of Israel, you will not lead them into the land that I promised to give them."

Num 20:13 This happened at Meribah, where the people of Israel complained against the LORD and where he showed them that he is holy.

Edom Refuses Passage

Num 20:14 Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. They said, "This message is from your kinsmen, the tribes of Israel. You know the hardships we have suffered,

Num 20:15 how our ancestors went to Egypt, where we lived many years. The Egyptians mistreated our ancestors and us,

Num 20:16 and we cried to the LORD for help. He heard our cry and sent an angel, who led us out of Egypt. Now we are at Kadesh, a town at the border of your territory.

Num 20:17 Please permit us to pass through your land. We and our cattle will not leave the road or go into your fields or vineyards, and we will not drink from your wells. We will stay on the main road until we are out of your territory."

Num 20:18 But the Edomites answered, "We refuse to let you pass through our country! If you try, we will march out and attack you."

Num 20:19 The people of Israel said, "We will stay on the main road, and if we or our animals drink any of your water, we will pay for it—all we want is to pass through."

Num 20:20 The Edomites repeated, "We refuse!" and they marched out with a powerful army to attack the people of Israel.

Num 20:21 Because the Edomites would not let the Israelites pass through their territory, the Israelites turned and went another way.

The Death of Aaron

Num 20:22 The whole community of Israel left Kadesh and arrived at Mount Hor,

Num 20:23 on the border of Edom. There the LORD said to Moses and Aaron,

Num 20:24 "Aaron is not going to enter the land which I promised to give to Israel; he is going to die, because the two of you rebelled against my command at Meribah.

Num 20:25 Take Aaron and his son Eleazar up Mount Hor,

Num 20:26 and there remove Aaron's priestly robes and put them on Eleazar. Aaron is going to die there."

Num 20:27 Moses did what the LORD had commanded. They went up Mount Hor in the sight of the whole community,

Num 20:28 and Moses removed Aaron's priestly robes and put them on Eleazar. There on the top of the mountain Aaron died, and Moses and Eleazar came back down.

Num 20:29 The whole community learned that Aaron had died, and they all mourned for him for thirty days.

Numbers 20:1-29

Numbers 20 - The Beginning of the End

A. Contention among the children of Israel.

1. (1) The death of Miriam.

Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month,

and the people stayed in Kadesh; and Miriam died there and was buried there.

a. **The people stayed in Kadesh; and Miriam died there and was buried there:** Miriam died in Kadesh. Through the years of wandering in the wilderness, Israel came back to Kadesh, the place where they rejected God's offer (Num 13:26).

b. **Miriam died there and was buried there:** Miriam's death was an important point in the journey from Egypt to Canaan. She was the first of Moses' siblings to die in the wilderness, and her death was an important demonstration of the fulfillment of what God promised: That the generation which refused to enter Canaan would die in the wilderness, and the new generation would enter instead (Num 14:29-34).

i. Miriam's death shows us there were no special exceptions for the family of Moses. God said only Joshua and Caleb would survive from that generation (Num 14:30), and that included, Miriam, Aaron, even Moses himself. This chapter will show the frailty of each of these giants in the account of the Exodus.

ii. Many people still deceive themselves into thinking they have a special exception from God, believing they are a special case, with their own special arrangement with the LORD. If Moses and his siblings had no special deal, we should not be so arrogant to think we have our own deal with God.

c. **Miriam died there and was buried there:** Miriam died a complex character. She was great for her courage in assisting Moses and his parents (Exo 2:4-8), and great for her leading Israel in praise (Exo 15:20-21). But she was also disgraced for her rebellion against Moses (Numbers 12). One incident of rebellion left a black mark on her whole life.

2. (2-6) *Israel contends with Moses and Aaron because of thirst.*

Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron. And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink." So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them.

a. **There was no water for the congregation:** The need was real, but the response of Israel was filled with unbelief and bad attitude - which always go together! When you find a bad attitude, you will also find a lack of simple, secure trust in God.

b. **If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD:** Their contention led them to outrageous statements, words lacking any trust in God. The older generation of unbelief was almost dead, and now the younger generation started to act like the unbelieving generation. They openly doubted God's promise that He *would* lead them into the land of promise.

c. **Why have you brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here:** Their contentions lead them to outrageous accusations. The new generation accuses Moses just as the generation of unbelief did!

d. **Not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates:** Their contentions lead them to a stunted vision. Of course, the wilderness was not a fruitful land. But they would never make it to the land of rich fruit until they came through the wilderness trusting God.

e. **Moses and Aaron... fell on their faces:** They realized how serious this was. With this contentious attitude, the new generation would be just as unbelieving, as untrusting in God as the old generation was, and they would likewise perish in the wilderness.

3. (7-8) *God's command to Moses: Provide water for Israel.*

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals."

a. **Take the rod... Speak to the rock before their eyes:** Specifically, God told Moses to **take the rod**, but not to use it. Water would be provided if Moses would **speak to the rock before their eyes**.

b. **And it will yield its water:** Back at Mount Sinai, God told Moses to strike the rock and water came forth (Exo 17:6). But now he was merely to speak to the rock, yet with the rod in his hand. This rod was a symbol of his authority from God.

4. (9-11) *Moses' contention with the people - and with the LORD.*

So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for

you out of this rock?" Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.

- a. **So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him:** Moses began by doing exactly what the LORD had told him to do: Take the rod and gather the people of Israel.
- b. **Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock:** God did not command him to speak to the nation, and to speak so severely to the nation, yet Moses did.
 - i. Moses, after doing what God had told him to do, then did something God had not told him to do: He *lectured* the nation.
 - ii. Worse, he lectured the nation with an attitude of heart he had not shown before - one of anger and contempt for the people of God, with a bitter heart. Before, Moses fell on his face before God when the people rebelled (Num 16:4). At Marah, when the people contended with Moses because the waters were bitter, Moses cried out to the LORD, not against the people (Exo 15:22-25). When the people did need to be boldly confronted, Moses did it (as at Massah and Meribah in Exo 17:1-7); but without the edge of anger, contempt, and bitterness we see here. There are a hundred *explanations* for Moses' frustration here (Psa 106:32-33 describes how the people provoked Moses here), but not a single *excuse*.
 - iii. Worse yet, Moses not only took the rebellion of the people against the LORD too personally, he also over-magnified his own partnership with God: **Must we bring water for you out of this rock?** Moses spoke

as if he and God would do the job, as if they divided the work fifty-fifty; as if God couldn't bring water unless he was around to speak to the rock. His lapse into contempt for the people led him into a lapse of subtle pride.

c. **Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod:** Moses disobeyed God directly, striking the rock instead of speaking to it.

i. Not only did he strike it, but he struck it **twice**. When he struck the rock at the beginning of the Exodus journey, he only had to strike it once, but now, out of anger and frustration, he did it **twice**.

d. **Water came out abundantly:** Yet, despite Moses' lapse into sinful attitude and action, God still provided abundantly for the people.

i. This teaches us that God's love for His people is so great, he will use very imperfect instruments, and that the fact God uses someone is no evidence - to themselves or to the people - that they themselves are really right with God or ministering according to God's heart.

ii. God would deal with Moses, but the people needed water - and so it was provided. Moses might have come away thinking he did right, and the people probably thought so as well - because what Moses did seemed to *work*. But what *works* is not the best measure of what is right before God.

5. (12-13) *God's rebuke and correction of Moses.*

Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." This was the water of Meribah, because the children

of Israel contended with the LORD, and He was hallowed among them.

- a. **Because you did not believe Me:** Moses' sinful attitude and action was rooted in unbelief. He didn't *really* believe God when the LORD told him to speak to the rock and not to strike it.
- b. **To hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel:** What Moses did was an *unholy* thing. He made God look no different than an angry man or one of the temperamental pagan gods. He did not reflect the heart and character of God before the people.
- c. **Therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land:** God's correction of Moses was hard; he would not lead Israel into the Promised Land. That which he dreamed of and felt called to even as a child in the palaces of Egypt - to deliver God's people - would not be completed. Another person would finish the job.
 - i. This was only painful because of Moses' faithful heart; an unfaithful man is not pained at the idea that he cannot complete what God had called him to.
 - ii. We might have thought, Israel might have thought, and Moses might have thought he was exempt from the decree that all the generation that was of age when the Exodus began would perish in the wilderness - after all, Moses was Moses! But Moses, great a leader as he was, was still a man subject to God and God's law.
- d. **You shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them:** This may seem an excessively harsh punishment for Moses. It seems that with only one slip-up, he now had to die short of the Promised Land. But Moses was being judged by a stricter standard because of his leadership position with the

nation, and because he had a uniquely close relationship with God.

i. It is right for teachers and leaders to be judged by a stricter standard (Jas 3:1); though it is unrighteous to hold teachers and leaders to a perfect standard. It is true the people's conduct was worse than Moses', but it is irrelevant.

ii. Worst of all, Moses defaced a beautiful picture of Jesus' redemptive work through the rock which provided water in the wilderness. The New Testament makes it clear this water-providing, life-giving rock was a picture of Jesus (1Co 10:4). Jesus, being struck once, provided life for all who would drink of Him (Joh 7:37). But it was unnecessary - and unrighteous - that Jesus would be struck again, much less again twice, because the Son of God needed only to suffer once (Heb 10:10-12). Jesus can now be come to with words of faith (Rom 10:8-10), as Moses should have only used words of faith to bring life-giving water to the nation of Israel. Moses "ruined" this picture of the work of Jesus God intended.

e. **And He was hallowed among them:** At the end of it all, God was seen as holy among the children of Israel. Moses did not hallow God in this incident, but God hallowed Himself through the correction of Moses. God will get His glory, God will be hallowed - but will it come through our obedience or our correction?

B. On the way to the Promised Land - again.

1. (14-17) *Messengers to the king of Edom.*

Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. "Thus says your brother Israel: 'You know all the hardship that has befallen us, how our fathers went down to Egypt, and we dwelt in Egypt a long

time, and the Egyptians afflicted us and our fathers. When we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice and sent the Angel and brought us up out of Egypt; now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border. Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King's Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory."

a. **Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom:** Israel was now at Kadesh, and they wanted to go through the land of Edom - taking them closer to the Promised Land than they had ever been before, beyond where they failed to go in because of unbelief. This was the fifth stage of the Exodus.

- First, from Egypt to Mount Sinai (Exo 12:31 to Exo 18:27).
- Second, the sojourn at Mount Sinai (Exo 19:1 to Num 10:10).
- Third, the first approach to the Promised Land, beginning at Mount Sinai, but being aborted at Kadesh with the refusal to enter the Promised Land in faith (Num 10:11 to Num 14:45).
- Fourth, the 38 years of wandering in the wilderness until the generation of unbelief had died (Num 15:1 to Num 20:13).
- Now, fifth, the second and final approach to the Promised Land (Num 20:14 to Jos 2:24).

b. **Thus says your brother Israel:** The nation of Israel was **brother** to the nation of Edom, because the patriarch Israel (also known as Jacob) was brother to

Esau (also known as Edom), as related in Gen 25:19-34.

c. **Please let us pass through your country:** All Moses asked for on behalf of Israel was the permission to pass through. They expected no provision from the Edomites because they trusted God to provide all their needs.

2. (18-21) *The Edomites refuse passage to the Israelites.*

Then Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through my land, lest I come out against you with the sword." So the children of Israel said to him, "We will go by the Highway, and if I or my livestock drink any of your water, then I will pay for it; let me only pass through on foot, nothing more." Then he said, "You shall not pass through." So Edom came out against them with many men and with a strong hand. Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his territory; so Israel turned away from him.

a. **You shall not pass through my land, lest I come out against you with the sword:** This was an unnecessary refusal. It would have cost Edom nothing and been a genuine gesture of goodwill. But the Edomites, perhaps out of suspicion or fear, refused.

b. **So Israel turned away from him:** This refusal made the journey of the children of Israel much more discouraging and dangerous (Num 21:4-5), but there seems to be no record of God punishing Edom for this sin. In fact, Israel was still commanded to treat the Edomite as a brother (Deu 23:7). God here showed Israel how to leave the judgment of those who hurt you up to the LORD, and how to love those who have acted as enemies against you - even if they were brothers.

3. (22-29) *The death of Aaron.*

Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor. And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying: "Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up to Mount Hor; and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; for Aaron shall be gathered to his people and die there." So Moses did just as the LORD commanded, and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. Now when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days.

a. **Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor:** Here a definite marker, indicating the end of the 38 years Israel had been "sentenced" to in the wilderness. Num 33:38 tells us *Aaron died there in the fortieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt.*

i. There is very little record of what happened during these years; they are compressed into only five and one-half chapters, while the single year at Mount Sinai is given almost 50 chapters. This was to demonstrate these years accomplished nothing, except the death of the generation of unbelief. These were just years of surviving in the desert, wasted years, waiting for the "old man" to die.

ii. During those 38 years, there was much movement - but no progress. Our walk with God can be the same way.

iii. "Because Israel had rebelled, their life has run to waste ever since, and only now, after such a lapse of time, and after so much suffering, did Israel find itself in a position to recommence the march that was suspended at Kadesh. So it is with the churches which have reached a certain point, then rebelled against the voice of God. Their history runs to waste; they exist, but hardly live; there is indeed a movement in them, but it has no definite aim, it leads no where; they just end up in the same place all the time. Only after a long time (if God has mercy on them) do they find themselves once more in a position to start afresh, and with not one step further forward in all of those years. Even so it is with individuals who will not go resolutely on when they are called. They are spent and wasted in movement back and forth which is not progress. After many years perhaps - perhaps after a whole lifetime - of wandering in dry places they find themselves once more at the very point to which they had come before, and not one step closer." (Winterbotham in *Pulpit Commentary*)

c. **Aaron died there on the top of the mountain:** The passing of Aaron is a huge landmark in the history of Israel; he was the first high priest of the nation - and yet, not exempt from the decree that his generation would perish in the wilderness.

i. Moses, who represented the law, could not lead them into the Promised Land. Miriam, who represents the prophets, could not lead them into the Promised Land. Aaron, who represents the priests, could not lead them into the Promised Land. Only Joshua, that

is, JESUS, could lead them into the land of God's promise.

d. Aaron died there on the top of the mountain:

Aaron died as a great, but complex figure, even more so than Miriam. He was used of God mightily, as Moses' partner (Exo 4:27-31), to initiate the priesthood (Leviticus 8), and to plead with Moses for the people (Numbers 16-17). At the same time, he was instrumental in the grotesque debacle of the golden calf (Exodus 32) and in challenging Moses' authority with his sister Miriam (Numbers 12).

i. Aaron's life shows us, among other things, that the office is more important than the man himself. Aaron the man was not always worthy of respect, but Aaron the high priest always was worthy of honor.

e. Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son: God gave special warning about Aaron's death, so a smooth and graceful transition could be made in passing down the position of high priest to Aaron's oldest living son, Eleazar.

i. The man dies, but the priesthood - and the access and relationship with God it describes - carries on. No one's relationship with God in Israel was to depend on Aaron, but on the high priest - whomever he was. God has ensured there will always be a high priest for us to come to in Jesus (Heb 4:14-16), and we need not depend on any man for our relationship with God.

Arad Destroyed

Num 21:1 When the Canaanite king of Arad in the southern part of Canaan heard that the Israelites were coming by way of Atharim, he attacked them and captured some of them.

Num 21:2 Then the Israelites made a vow to the LORD: "If you will let us conquer these people, we will unconditionally dedicate them and their cities to you and will destroy them."

Num 21:3 The LORD heard them and helped them conquer the Canaanites. So the Israelites completely destroyed them and their cities, and named the place Hormah.

The Bronze Serpent

Num 21:4 The Israelites left Mount Hor by the road that leads to the Gulf of Aqaba, in order to go around the territory of Edom. But on the way the people lost their patience

Num 21:5 and spoke against God and Moses. They complained, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in this desert, where there is no food or water? We can't stand any more of this miserable food!"

Num 21:6 Then the LORD sent poisonous snakes among the people, and many Israelites were bitten and died.

Num 21:7 The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Now pray to the LORD to take these snakes away." So Moses prayed for the people.

Num 21:8 Then the LORD told Moses to make a metal snake and put it on a pole, so that anyone who was bitten could look at it and be healed.

Num 21:9 So Moses made a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who had been bitten would look at the bronze snake and be healed.

The Song of the Well

Num 21:10 The Israelites moved on and camped at Oboth.

Num 21:11 After leaving that place, they camped at the ruins of Abarim in the wilderness east of Moabite territory.

Num 21:12 Then they camped in Zered Valley.

Num 21:13 From there they moved again and camped on the north side of the Arnon River, in the wilderness which extends into Amorite territory. (The Arnon was the border between the Moabites and the Amorites.)

Num 21:14 That is why *The Book of the LORD's Battles* speaks of "...the town of Waheb in the area of Suphah, and the valleys; the Arnon River,

Num 21:15 and the slope of the valleys that extend to the town of Ar and toward the border of Moab."

Num 21:16 From there they went on to a place called Wells, where the LORD said to Moses, "Bring the people together, and I will give them water."

Num 21:17 At that time the people of Israel sang this song: "Wells, produce your water; And we will greet it with a song—

Num 21:18 The well dug by princes And by leaders of the people, Dug with a royal scepter And with their walking sticks." They moved from the wilderness to Mattanah,

Num 21:19 and from there they went on to Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel to Bamoth,

Num 21:20 and from Bamoth to the valley in the territory of the Moabites, below the top of Mount Pisgah, looking out over the desert.

King Sihon Defeated

Num 21:21 Then the people of Israel sent messengers to the Amorite king Sihon to say:

Num 21:22 "Let us pass through your land. We and our cattle will not leave the road and go into your fields or vineyards, and we will not drink water from your wells; we will stay on the main road until we are out of your territory."

Num 21:23 But Sihon would not permit the people of Israel to pass through his territory. He gathered his army and

went out to Jahaz in the wilderness and attacked the Israelites.

Num 21:24 But the Israelites killed many of the enemy in battle and occupied their land from the Arnon River north to the Jabbok, that is, to the Ammonites, because the Ammonite border was strongly defended.

Num 21:25 So the people of Israel captured all the Amorite cities, including Heshbon and all the surrounding towns, and settled in them.

Num 21:26 Heshbon was the capital city of the Amorite king Sihon, who had fought against the former king of Moab and had captured all his land as far as the Arnon River.

Num 21:27 That is why the poets sing, "Come to Heshbon, to King Sihon's city! We want to see it rebuilt and restored.

Num 21:28 Once from this city of Heshbon Sihon's army went forth like a fire; It destroyed the city of Ar in Moab And devoured the hills of the upper Arnon.

Num 21:29 How terrible for you, people of Moab! You worshipers of Chemosh are brought to ruin! Your god let the men become refugees, And the women became captives of the Amorite king.

Num 21:30 But now their descendants are destroyed, All the way from Heshbon to Dibon, From Nashim to Nophah, near Medeba."

King Og Defeated

Num 21:31 So the people of Israel settled in the territory of the Amorites,

Num 21:32 and Moses sent men to find the best way to attack the city of Jazer. The Israelites captured it and its surrounding towns and drove out the Amorites living there.

Num 21:33 Then the Israelites turned and took the road to Bashan, and King Og of Bashan marched out with his army to attack them at Edrei.

Num 21:34 The LORD said to Moses, "Do not be afraid of him. I will give you victory over him, all his people, and his land. Do to him what you did to Sihon, the Amorite king who ruled at Heshbon."

Num 21:35 So the Israelites killed Og, his sons, and all his people, leaving no survivors, and then they occupied his land.

Numbers 21:1-35

Numbers 21 - On the Way to Canaan

A. The serpent in the wilderness.

1. (1-3) Defeat of the king of Arad the Canaanite.

The king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the South, heard that Israel was coming on the road to Atharim, then he fought against Israel and took some of them prisoners. So Israel made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities." And the LORD listened to the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites, and they utterly destroyed them and their cities. So the name of that place was called Hormah.

a. **The king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the South, heard that Israel was coming:** As the new generation of Israel begin their approach to the Promised Land, the new generation encounters their first hostile army - Arad the Canaanite, in the South.

b. **Then he fought against Israel and took some of them prisoners:** After having some men lost to Arad, Israel vowed to God that they **will utterly destroy** the cities of Arad. That is, they would devote the cities of Arad unto God by completely destroying them. God then

granted them victory (**the LORD listened to the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites**).

- i. It is strange idea to our way of thinking, but Israel at this time would show that property was completely given to God by destroying it - thus making it unusable to anyone else. It was an expensive and whole-hearted way to give things to the LORD. This was Israel's way of saying, "we're not fighting this battle for our own profit, but for the glory of God."
- c. **So the name of that place was called Hormah:** It was at Hormah that Israel was defeated in their ill-advised attempt to enter the Promised Land by force after rejecting it by faith. Now God has brought them back to the same place and given them the victory. A real turning point for the nation!

2. (4-5) *Israel, provoked by the difficult journey, speaks against God.*

Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread."

- a. **To go around the land of Edom:** They had to go far out of their way because the Edomites refused them passage (Num 20:14-21). In fact, to go around the Edomites, they had to turn back towards the wilderness and away from Canaan. This was obviously discouraging.
 - i. They had a *reason* to be discouraged but they had no *excuse* for their discouragement. They faced a real challenge and something that is no fun at all. Yet,

they had no excuse for not trusting in God, and for not looking for His victory through it all.

b. **The people spoke against God and against Moses:** Sadly, the new generation sounded like the old. If they continued in the steps of their fathers, this new generation would be no better able to enter the Promised Land than the previous generation was.

i. In fact, they perhaps acted worse than their fathers here. In eight previous passages (Exo 15:24; Exo 16:2; Exo 17:3; Num 12:1; Num 14:2; Num 16:3; Num 16:41; Num 20:2), the children of Israel are described as speaking *against Moses*. In those situations, Moses knew (Exo 16:7-8) and the LORD knew (Num 14:27) they were really speaking against God - but the people were not brazen enough to do it directly. Now they were brazen enough, because it says **the people spoke against God and against Moses!**

ii. This was a major problem: They were on the threshold of the Promised Land, closer to it than the previous generation of unbelief had been, and now they were beginning to act with the same unbelief - or worse! Something drastic had to be done.

3. (6) *The LORD sends fiery serpents.*

So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.

a. **The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people:** How were the serpents **fiery**? Some think they were a red color, like the color of fire. Others believe their bite caused an intense burning sensation, so they were called **fiery serpents.**

b. **The LORD sent fiery serpents:** These came from God, to get the nation's attention at this critical place in their journey to the Promised Land. If they kept going in the direction they showed in the previous verses, they would never enter in.

c. **Many of the people of Israel died:** These victims were mostly those of the older generation of unbelief, and this was God's final way of fulfilling His promise that they would perish in the wilderness, and not enter the Promised Land.

4. (7-9) *Deliverance through looking at the bronze serpent.*

Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, "**Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.**" So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

a. **We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you:** If this new generation was capable of deeper sin (such as openly complaining against the LORD in Num 21:5), they also have hearts softer and quicker to repent - they quickly humble themselves before the LORD and Moses.

i. They ask Moses to pray for them; they know their answer lies only in the saving work of God. They are not trusting in luck or medical expertise, but only in God.

b. **Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he**

looks at it, shall live: God commanded Moses to make a serpent (and Moses makes it out of bronze), to set it on pole, so that those who looked upon it could be saved - and they were.

i. This was an unusual direction from God and miracle resulting. There is no immediate logical connection between merely looking at a serpent on a pole and living; or refusing to look and dying. But God commanded that such a "foolish" thing be used to bring salvation to Israel.

c. **Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole:** Jesus referred to this remarkable event in Joh 3:14-15 : *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* Jesus clearly said there is a similarity between what Moses did here, and what Jesus did on the cross.

i. But how can a *serpent* have a similarity to Jesus? Serpents are often used as pictures of evil in the Bible (Gen 3:1-5; Rev 12:9). However, bronze is a metal associated with judgment in the Bible because bronze must be made by passing through the "fires" of judgment.

ii. So, a *bronze* serpent does speak of evil; but evil having been judged - just as Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us on the cross, and our sin was judged in Jesus. A bronze serpent is a picture of evil judged and dealt with.

iii. We would have wanted to diminish our sense of sin and put the image of a man up on the pole; a man, we might say, is some good and some bad. But a serpent we can more easily see the badness of!

iv. In addition, if the serpent lay horizontally on the vertical pole, it is easy to see how this was a *visual* representation of the cross as well. However, many traditions show the serpent being wrapped around the pole, and this is the source for the ancient figure of healing and medicine - a serpent, wrapped around a pole.

d. **If a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived:** The people were saved not by *doing* anything, but by simply *looking* to the bronze serpent. They had to trust that something as seemingly foolish as looking at a serpent on a pole was enough to save them. Surely, some perished because they thought it too foolish to do that.

i. As it says in Isa 45:22 : *Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.* We might be willing to do a hundred things to earn our salvation, but God commands us to only trust in Him - to look to Him.

ii. Charles Spurgeon gave his life to Jesus Christ after hearing a message on Isa 45:22, and hearing that text applied to this account of Moses lifting the serpent in the wilderness, and the people looking and living. Spurgeon was so impressed by this picture of the gospel and salvation in the Book of Numbers that he chose an engraving of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness as a logo for his publications.

iii. When Israel was complaining against the LORD and against Moses, they were not looking to the LORD they way they should. They were looking at themselves, they were looking at the hard circumstances - but they were not looking to the LORD. What will it take to get you to look to the LORD?

e. **So Moses made a bronze serpent:** God command Moses to make an image of a serpent, even though such images were seemingly forbidden in Exo 20:4. Actually, Exo 20:4 forbids the making of idols, and this was no idol - it was a symbol, sanctioned by God, that they could look to in faith and be saved.

i. Sadly, even this God-ordained symbol was made into an idol. In the reforms of King Hezekiah, he *broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan* (2Ki 18:4). Fallen man can take any good and glorious thing from God and find an idolatrous use for it.

B. On the way to the Promised Land.

1. (10-20) The journey into Moab.

Now the children of Israel moved on and camped in Oboth. And they journeyed from Oboth and camped at Ije Abarim, in the wilderness which is east of Moab, toward the sunrise. From there they moved and camped in the Valley of Zered. From there they moved and camped on the other side of the Arnon, which is in the wilderness that extends from the border of the Amorites; for the Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. Therefore it is said in the Book of the Wars of the LORD:

**"Waheb in Supah,
The brooks of the Arnon,
And the slope of the brooks
That reaches to the dwelling of Ar,
And lies on the border of Moab."**

From there they went to Beer, which is the well where the LORD said to Moses, "Gather the people

together, and I will give them water.” Then Israel sang this song:

**“Spring up, O well!
All of you sing to it--
The well the leaders sank,
Dug by the nation’s nobles,
By the lawgiver, with their staves.”**

And from the wilderness *they went* to Mattanah, from Mattanah to Nahaliel, from Nahaliel to Bamoth, and from Bamoth, *in the valley that is in the country of Moab*, to the top of Pisgah which looks down on the wasteland.

a. **Now the children of Israel moved on and camped:** Besides the names of the places Israel passes through on their way towards the Promised Land, brief passages of poetry are also recorded, giving the sense of elation they must have felt.

b. **The Book of the Wars of the LORD:** Some have used mentions of books like this in the Bible as an argument that the Bible is an incomplete book and must be supplemented - by something like the book of Mormon. But the mere mention of a book by the Bible doesn't mean that the book belongs in our Bibles. We would love to see and read such ancient literature lost to history; but anything in such books inspired and important is recorded for us in passages like Num 21:14-15.

i. In fact, Paul quoted from a pagan poet in Act 17:28. It certainly doesn't mean that everything that pagan poet wrote was inspired by God, or that our Bibles are incomplete without the full text of what that pagan poet wrote.

2. (21-23) *The challenge of the Amorites.*

Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, "Let me pass through your land. We will not turn aside into fields or vineyards; we will not drink water from wells. We will go by the King's Highway until we have passed through your territory." But Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his territory. So Sihon gathered all his people together and went out against Israel in the wilderness, and he came to Jahaz and fought against Israel.

a. **Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his territory:** As was the case with the Edomites, the Amorites would not let Israel pass through their land - even though the Israelites promised it would be of no expense or trouble to the Amorites.

b. **So Sihon gathered all his people together and went out against Israel:** While Edom passively refused, the Amorites actively attacked Israel and king Sihon led the battle.

i. This incident is even more interesting when we consider Deu 2:30 - *But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass through, for the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that He might deliver him into your hand.* God hardened the heart of Sihon, so he would provoke the battle, so he would lose, so Israel could gain his land.

ii. It was not unrighteous of God to harden the heart of Sihon because Sihon was *not* originally favorable towards Israel, and God did not make him be hardened when he really wanted otherwise. But that wasn't how it happened; in hardening Sihon, the LORD gave him over to the evil his heart desired.

3. (24-32) *King Sihon and the Amorites defeated by Israel.*

Then Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword, and took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as the people of Ammon; for the border of the people of Ammon was fortified. So Israel took all these cities, and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon and in all its villages. For Heshbon was the city of Sihon king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and had taken all his land from his hand as far as the Arnon. Therefore those who speak in proverbs say:

**"Come to Heshbon, let it be built;
Let the city of Sihon be repaired.
For fire went out from Heshbon,
A flame from the city of Sihon;
It consumed Ar of Moab,
The lords of the heights of the Arnon.
Woe to you, Moab!
You have perished, O people of Chemosh!
He has given his sons as fugitives,
And his daughters into captivity,
To Sihon king of the Amorites.
But we have shot at them;
Heshbon has perished as far as Dibon.
Then we laid waste as far as Nophah,
Which reaches to Medeba."**

Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites. Then Moses sent to spy out Jazer; and they took its villages and drove out the Amorites who were there.

a. **Then Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword, and took possession of his land:** We now better understand God's favor and mercy to Israel. Before they face the hardened warriors of Canaan, God gave them smaller foes and smaller battles to fight. We

see how foolish the unbelief of the previous generation was.

b. **Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites:**

The land of the Amorites later becomes the possession of Israel; the tribe of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh receive this land.

c. **Fire went out from Heshbon... woe to you Moab:**

The passages of poetry are meant to show what a mighty people the Amorites were, and in contrast, how glorious Israel's victory over them was.

4. (33-35) *The defeat of king Og and the land of Bashan.*

And they turned and went up by the way to Bashan. So Og king of Bashan went out against them, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Do not fear him, for I have delivered him into your hand, with all his people and his land; and you shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon." So they defeated him, his sons, and all his people, until there was no survivor left him; and they took possession of his land.

a. **Og king of Bashan went out against them:** This was another battle that Israel did not provoke. Yet, Israel was more than up to the challenge, and sees God win a glorious victory.

b. **And they took possession of his land:** This land also becomes part of Israel, and a portion of the inheritance of the trans-jordan tribes.

i. The new generation of the children of Israel are making wonderful progress to the Promised Land and experiencing victory after victory. Yet their challenges are not over, as the subsequent chapters will show.

Balak Summons Balaam

Num 22:1 The Israelites moved on and set up camp in the plains of Moab east of the Jordan and opposite Jericho.

Num 22:2 When the king of Moab, Balak son of Zippor, heard what the Israelites had done to the Amorites and how many Israelites there were,

Num 22:3 he and all his people became terrified.

Num 22:4 The Moabites said to the leaders of the Midianites, "This horde will soon destroy everything around us, like a bull eating the grass in a pasture." So King Balak

Num 22:5 sent messengers to summon Balaam son of Beor, who was at Pethor near the Euphrates River in the land of Amaw. They brought him this message from Balak: "I want you to know that a whole nation has come from Egypt; its people are spreading out everywhere and threatening to take over our land.

Num 22:6 They outnumber us, so please come and put a curse on them for me. Then perhaps we will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. I know that when you pronounce a blessing, people are blessed, and when you pronounce a curse, they are placed under a curse."

Num 22:7 So the Moabite and Midianite leaders took with them the payment for the curse, went to Balaam, and gave him Balak's message.

Num 22:8 Balaam said to them, "Spend the night here, and tomorrow I will report to you whatever the LORD tells me." So the Moabite leaders stayed with Balaam.

Num 22:9 God came to Balaam and asked, "Who are these people that are staying with you?"

Num 22:10 He answered, "King Balak of Moab has sent them to tell me

Num 22:11 that a people who came from Egypt has spread out over the whole land. He wants me to curse them for him, so that he can fight them and drive them out."

Num 22:12 God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them, and do not put a curse on the people of Israel, because they have my blessing."

Num 22:13 The next morning Balaam went to Balak's messengers and said, "Go back home; the LORD has refused to let me go with you."

Num 22:14 So they returned to Balak and told him that Balaam had refused to come with them.

Num 22:15 Then Balak sent a larger number of leaders, who were more important than the first.

Num 22:16 They went to Balaam and gave him this message from Balak: "Please don't let anything prevent you from coming to me!"

Num 22:17 I will reward you richly and do anything you say. Please come and curse these people for me."

Num 22:18 But Balaam answered, "Even if Balak gave me all the silver and gold in his palace, I could not disobey the command of the LORD my God in even the smallest matter.

Num 22:19 But please spend the night, as the others did, so that I may learn whether or not the LORD has something else to tell me."

Num 22:20 That night God came to Balaam and said, "If these men have come to ask you to go with them, get ready and go, but do only what I tell you."

Num 22:21 So the next morning Balaam saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite leaders.

Balaam's Donkey and the Angel

Num 22:22 God was angry that Balaam was going, and as Balaam was riding along on his donkey, accompanied by his two servants, the angel of the LORD stood in the road to bar his way.

Num 22:23 When the donkey saw the angel standing there holding a sword, it left the road and turned into the fields.

Balaam beat the donkey and brought it back onto the road.

Num 22:24 Then the angel stood where the road narrowed between two vineyards and had a stone wall on each side.

Num 22:25 When the donkey saw the angel, it moved over against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against it. Again Balaam beat the donkey.

Num 22:26 Once more the angel moved ahead; he stood in a narrow place where there was no room at all to pass on either side.

Num 22:27 This time, when the donkey saw the angel, it lay down. Balaam lost his temper and began to beat the donkey with his stick.

Num 22:28 Then the LORD gave the donkey the power of speech, and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you? Why have you beaten me these three times?"

Num 22:29 Balaam answered, "Because you have made a fool of me! If I had a sword, I would kill you."

Num 22:30 The donkey replied, "Am I not the same donkey on which you have ridden all your life? Have I ever treated you like this before?" "No," he answered.

Num 22:31 Then the LORD let Balaam see the angel standing there with his sword; and Balaam threw himself face downward on the ground.

Num 22:32 The angel demanded, "Why have you beaten your donkey three times like this? I have come to bar your way, because you should not be making this journey.

Num 22:33 But your donkey saw me and turned aside three times. If it hadn't, I would have killed you and spared the donkey."

Num 22:34 Balaam replied, "I have sinned. I did not know that you were standing in the road to oppose me; but now if you think it is wrong for me to go on, I will return home."

Num 22:35 But the angel said, "Go on with these men, but say only what I tell you to say." So Balaam went on with

them.

Num 22:36 When Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went to meet him at Ar, a city on the Arnon River at the border of Moab.

Num 22:37 Balak said to him, "Why didn't you come when I sent for you the first time? Did you think I wasn't able to reward you enough?"

Num 22:38 Balaam answered, "I came, didn't I? But now, what power do I have? I can say only what God tells me to say."

Num 22:39 So Balaam went with Balak to the town of Huzoth,

Num 22:40 where Balak slaughtered cattle and sheep and gave some of the meat to Balaam and the leaders who were with him.

Num 22:41 The next morning Balak took Balaam up to Bamoth Baal, from where Balaam could see a part of the people of Israel.

Numbers 22:1-41

Numbers 22 - Balak and Balaam

A. Balak's evil desire.

1. (1-4) Balak, king of Moab, fears an advancing Israel.

Then the children of Israel moved, and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan across from Jericho. Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was exceedingly afraid of the people because they were many, and Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel. So Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this company will lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field."

And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time.

a. **Then the children of Israel moved:** Israel was, at this point, on the move. They had essentially finished their 38-year exile in the wilderness, and then progressed towards the Promised Land. They continued further towards the Promised Land than the previous generation of unbelief had.

i. They also had the blessing of victory, God preparing them to fight the mighty Canaanites by a series of battles against lesser peoples: the southern Canaanites (Num 21:1-3), the Amorites (Num 21:23-24), and the Bashanites (Num 21:33-35).

b. **Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel:** As Israel advanced towards Moab, Balak, the king of Moab **was exceedingly afraid**. This was because of the size of Israel and because they had defeated neighbor nations.

c. **Now this company will lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field:** In one sense, Balak's fear was completely logical. On the other hand, if he had only known and believed God's word, he would have had nothing to fear. God commanded Israel to not harass Moab, because He did not intend to give Israel the land of the Moabites (Deu 2:9).

2. (5-6) *Balak's invitation to Balaam.*

Then he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying: "Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me! Therefore please come at once, curse this people for me, for

they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

a. **He sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor:**

A man named **Balaam** suddenly appears in the Book of Numbers. We do not know how he came to be estimated as a prophet or a man with spiritual powers, but Balak certainly knew his reputation.

i. As the account continues, it will be clear that Balaam has a knowledge of the true God, the God of Israel, not of some vague, demonic spiritual connection (such as the specific mention of the LORD in Num 22:8). How he came to know the true God is unclear; he is (in this regard) like Melchizedek (Gen 14:18) and Jethro (Exodus 18), men who were not Israelites, but came to some knowledge of the true God.

b. **Therefore please come at once, curse this people for me:**

Balak wanted Balaam to **curse** Israel, to cripple them spiritually so they could be defeated in battle. Balak seemed to know the strength of Israel was spiritually rooted, and they had to cut off from their source of power if they were to be conquered.

i. Balaam was known as a mighty man in spiritual things. As far as Balak was concerned, when Balaam cursed or blessed a man or a people, it came to pass.

B. Balaam's two meetings with Balak's representatives.

1. (7-8) *Balak sends men to hire Balaam's services as a prophet.*

So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the diviner's fee in their hand, and they

came to Balaam and spoke to him the words of Balak. And he said to them, "Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the LORD speaks to me." So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam.

- a. **The diviner's fee:** This suggests a standard fee for the work of a prophet. They took this standard fee in hand and approached Balaam.
- b. **Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you:** Balaam's first compromise was evident when he invited the men to **lodge here tonight**, so he could hear from God regarding their offer.
 - i. It was clearly wrong - then and now - to be a prophet for hire. Balaam essentially said, "Let me seek God about this" regarding a matter that was clearly sin and God's will was clear. He cared far more about **the diviner's fee** than about God's will.
 - ii. Immediately, the heart of Balaam was revealed. Though he was obviously a man with significant spiritual gifts, he was not a man with a genuine heart after God. He was "seeking God's will" regarding something that was plainly not His will.
 - iii. Balaam began on a dangerous course - entertaining, planning, setting his heart on something he knew to be sin, and looked for a spiritual excuse to pursue the sin. Because of his love for money, Balaam essentially tried to manipulate God into granting him a special exception.

2. (9-12) God's response to Balaam.

Then God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?" So Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying, 'Look, a people has come out of Egypt, and they cover the face of the earth. Come now, curse them for me;

perhaps I shall be able to overpower them and drive them out.” And God said to Balaam, “**You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.**”

- a. **Then God came to Balaam:** God had no obligation to respond to an obviously self-seeking heart like Balaam’s. But in mercy He did respond, warning Balaam to have nothing to do with these men.
- b. **Who are these men with you:** God knew the answer to this question, and He asked it because *Balaam* did not know. Yet, Balaam *did* know these were evil men come for an evil purpose, but Balaam did not act accordingly.
- c. **You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed:** This specific word from God to Balaam is crystal clear. He said, “Balaam, *do not go, and do not curse.*”

3. (13-15) *Balaam’s reply to Balak’s messengers and the counter-offer.*

So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, “Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you.” And the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak, and said, “**Balaam refuses to come with us.**” Then Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honorable than they.

- a. **The LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you:** This carries the sense that Balaam wanted to go, but God wouldn’t let him. We can easily picture Balaam saying it just this way to the messengers from Balak. “I would *really* like to go with you, but God won’t let me.”

i. It was as if Balaam is saying, "God doesn't want me to do this, but I can be persuaded." Balak would exploit this invitation.

b. **Then Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honorable than they:** It is clear this is the understanding Balak's messengers took back to their king, because he sent more honorable (and wealthier, no doubt) men to persuade Balaam.

4. (16-17) *Balak's messengers increase the offer to Balaam.*

And they came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: 'Please let nothing hinder you from coming to me; for I will certainly honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore please come, curse this people for me.'"

a. **I will certainly honor you greatly:** No longer did they merely carry with them *the diviner's fee* of Num 22:7; now they also brought a promise of great riches.

b. **Therefore please come, curse this people for me:** Balaam refused to decisively put away a temptation the first time it came. Now the temptation came back to him stronger than it was before.

5. (18-19) *Balaam entertains the offer from Balak's messengers.*

Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the LORD will say to me."

a. **Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold:** We can only imagine Balaam's tone of voice and expression when he said this. He probably

wistfully suggested a big offer from these richer messengers of Balak.

b. **I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more:** Yet, Balaam knew the character of true prophecy. It did not come from his own initiative, but from the LORD. Even though he wanted to do what they asked, he could not.

c. **Please stay here tonight:** This is proof that Balaam continued to entertain this sin. There was no need to seek God again, when the will of God was clear both from his moral conscience (which troubled him from the beginning) and from the clear revelation of God (spoken in Num 22:12).

d. **That I may know what more the LORD will say to me:** This sounds so spiritual. "Let me seek the LORD about this one" - but it was completely carnal. Balaam was like a child who, having once heard the father's answer, will ask again, hoping the father's will might change.

6. (20-21) God allows Balaam to go with Balak's messengers.

And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men come to call you, rise and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you; that you shall do." So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab.

a. **Rise and go with them:** God did not change His mind. Balaam would not now be *in* the will of God if he went with Balak's messengers.

i. We can say that God did *not* change His will. He had clearly declared His will, and Balaam had decisively rejected it. Now God prepared Balaam up for

judgment, to both test and reveal the wickedness of Balaam's heart.

- ii. We know that sometimes, God says "no" to the prayers of His people, because He loves them. But also, sometimes God says "yes" to the desires of the wicked because He will judge them.
- b. **Balaam rose in the morning:** No doubt, he woke up at the break of dawn. He could not wait to do the wrong his heart desired, and he is so happy God is "blessing" by allowing him to go!

i. We can imagine Balaam all sullen and depressed when God said "no" through both conscience and clear word. Then he was happy and excited, believing he had convinced God to say "yes" - with no idea what God was really doing.

C. Balaam, the donkey and the Angel.

1. (22-27) *God's message to Balaam through the Angel of the LORD.*

Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the LORD took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. Now the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road. Then the Angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on this side and a wall on that side. And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she pushed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again. Then the Angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a

narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff.

- a. **God's anger was aroused because he went:** Some might think this was unfair, seeing that God told Balaam to go and then was angry because he went. But Balaam only went because he had first rejected God voice, both in conscience and clear command, and God *should* be angry about that.
- b. **The donkey saw the Angel of the LORD:** The donkey was more spiritually perceptive than the prophet. The donkey had no spiritual gifts, but at least acknowledged his Creator. The prophet had wonderful spiritual gifts, but also a disobedient heart and walk.
- c. **The donkey turned aside out of the way:** The donkey, responding to the Angel of the LORD, turned one way, then another, then finally sat down to avoid judgment. The disobedient prophet suffered along the way, and also made the donkey suffer.
 - i. The donkey is a perfect picture of a simple, unspectacular, yet obedient follower of God - sensitive to God's direction, a thorn to the disobedient, and a victim of the wrath of the disobedient.
- d. **When the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam:** The unusually difficult circumstances of this journey might have suggested to Balaam that his trip was not of God. Yet Balaam probably took it all as being attack from the enemy and used the circumstances to strengthen his hope that God wanted him to work as a prophet for hire.

i. This shows the great difficulty of judging God's will by circumstances. Many circumstances can be interpreted two ways - if not more.

2. (28-30) *God's message to Balaam through the donkey.*

Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!" So the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since I became yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?" And he said, "No."

a. **Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey:** God miraculously gave the donkey the ability to speak, and she did; and she rebuked the prophet for his ungodly punishment of her (**What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?**).

i. We don't know the actual mechanism by which God gave the donkey the apparent mind and voice to speak, but it was certainly within the capability of the Creator.

b. **And Balaam said to the donkey:** Balaam was so irrational and angry that he answered back without hesitation. He seemed to be unimpressed by a donkey that carries on an intelligent conversation with him.

i. **For now I would kill you:** These were cruel words from a wicked prophet. They are a chilling reminder of what the wicked have often done to true prophets who might hinder their evil ways.

c. **And he said, "No":** Balaam admitted that the donkey got the best of him in this conversation. Balaam had to humble himself before the donkey, admitting that she

hadn't been this way before, so perhaps there was good reason for her to be this way now.

3. (31-33) *God's message to Balaam through seeing the Angel of the LORD.*

Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face. And the Angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before Me. The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live."

a. **The Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand:** This made the will of God pretty clear in this matter. God told Balaam, about as loud and clear as it could be said, "Don't go, turn back now." But Balaam would not listen.

b. **Your way is perverse before Me:** The Angel of the LORD rebuked Balaam for his mistreatment of his donkey, but especially because Balaam's **way** was **perverse**. The word **perverse** carries the idea of "going the wrong way in a rash manner." This was exactly Balaam's problem.

i. Since this is the **Angel of the LORD**, and that the Angel of the LORD tells Balaam that his sin is against Him personally (**your way is perverse before Me**), it indicates this is an Old Testament appearance of God the Son - the Second Member of the Trinity, Jesus, before His incarnation as a baby in Bethlehem. Jesus temporarily appeared in some sort of human form, for a specific Divine purpose.

4. (34-35) Balaam's meager "repentance" and sinful course.

And Balaam said to the Angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know You stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back." Then the Angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "**Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak.**" So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

a. **I have sinned:** This sounds humble enough, but it was obvious and easy to say when the Angel of the LORD stood before Balaam with a drawn sword in hand.

b. **If it displeases You I will turn back:** Balaam seemed undecided as to if he really was displeasing God. He asked, "**If it displeases You.**" God made His will clear to Balaam many times, yet Balaam still fished for the answer he wanted from God, and Balaam made it evident he did not want what God had already clearly revealed.

i. 2Pe 2:15-16 shows exactly where Balaam's heart was at: *They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.*

ii. The root of Balaam's sin was a love for money. Jud 1:11 calls it *the error of Balaam for profit.* It is sobering to understand there is *no sin that men will not commit just for the sake of money.*

iii. A distinguished man was speaking to a distinguished woman, and asked her: "Would you sleep with me for a million dollars?" The woman carefully thought it over and said that she would.

Then he asked, "Would you sleep with me for fifty dollars?" The woman took great offense, and said "Do you think I am some kind of whore?" The man answered, "Ma'am, we've already established you are a harlot. Now we are only bargaining over price." The same attitude has led many away from Jesus, selling Him for the sake of more money or more things.

c. **Go with the men:** In response to Balaam's hard heart, God gave Balaam over to his sinful desire. Again, God did not change His mind. Because of Balaam's hard heart, God sent Balaam on a path of judgment.

5. (36-41) *Balaam meets with Balak, king of Moab.*

Now when Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at the city of Moab, which is on the border at the Arnon, the boundary of the territory. Then Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not earnestly send to you, calling for you? Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honor you?" And Balaam said to Balak, "Look, I have come to you! Now, have I any power at all to say anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak." So Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kirjath Huzoth. Then Balak offered oxen and sheep, and he sent *some* to Balaam and to the princes who were with him. So it was the next day, that Balak took Balaam and brought him up to the high places of Baal, that from there he might observe the extent of the people.

a. **Am I not able to honor you:** Here, two kindred hearts met. Balak's warm promise of reward sounded like music in Balaam's ears.

b. **Balak took Balaam and brought him up to the high places of Baal:** After a bit of sacrifice, Balak then called upon Balaam to do what he hired him to do – to

curse Israel, to rob them of their spiritual strength, so they could be defeated in battle.

c. **The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak:** Balaam again protested that this was not in his hands. Perhaps he really believed and understood this, or perhaps this was his way of protecting himself in case he failed. Then he could say that it was God's fault, and not his.

Balaam's First Oracle

Num 23:1 He said to Balak, "Build seven altars here for me, and bring me seven bulls and seven rams."

Num 23:2 Balak did as he was told, and he and Balaam offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

Num 23:3 Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stand here by your burnt offering, while I go to see whether or not the LORD will meet me. I will tell you whatever he reveals to me." So he went alone to the top of a hill,

Num 23:4 and God met him. Balaam said to him, "I have built the seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each."

Num 23:5 The LORD told Balaam what to say and sent him back to Balak to give him his message.

Num 23:6 So he went back and found Balak still standing by his burnt offering with all the leaders of Moab.

Num 23:7 Balaam uttered this prophecy: "Balak king of Moab has brought me From Syria, from the eastern mountains. 'Come speak for me,' he said. 'Put a curse on the people of Israel.'

Num 23:8 How can I curse what God has not cursed, Or speak of doom when the LORD has not?

Num 23:9 From the high rocks I can see them; I can watch them from the hills. They are a nation that lives alone; They know they are blessed more than other nations.

Num 23:10 The descendants of Israel are like the dust—
There are too many of them to be counted. Let me end my
days like one of God's people; Let me die in peace like the
righteous."

Num 23:11 Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you
done to me? I brought you here to curse my enemies, but
all you have done is bless them."

Num 23:12 He answered, "I can say only what the LORD
tells me to say."

Balaam's Second Oracle

Num 23:13 Then Balak said to Balaam, "Come with me to
another place from which you can see only some of the
Israelites. Curse them for me from there."

Num 23:14 He took him to the field of Zophim on the top
of Mount Pisgah. There also he built seven altars and
offered a bull and a ram on each of them.

Num 23:15 Balaam said to Balak, "Stand here by your
burnt offering, and I will meet God over there."

Num 23:16 The LORD met Balaam, told him what to say,
and sent him back to Balak to give him his message.

Num 23:17 So he went back and found Balak still standing
by his burnt offering, with the leaders of Moab. Balak asked
what the LORD had said,

Num 23:18 and Balaam uttered this prophecy: "Come,
Balak son of Zippor, And listen to what I have to say.

Num 23:19 God is not like people, who lie; He is not a
human who changes his mind. Whatever he promises, he
does; He speaks, and it is done.

Num 23:20 I have been instructed to bless, And when God
blesses, I cannot call it back.

Num 23:21 I foresee that Israel's future Will bring her no
misfortune or trouble. The LORD their God is with them;
They proclaim that he is their king.

Num 23:22 God has brought them out of Egypt; He fights for them like a wild ox.

Num 23:23 There is no magic charm, no witchcraft, That can be used against the nation of Israel. Now people will say about Israel, 'Look what God has done!'

Num 23:24 The nation of Israel is like a mighty lion: It doesn't rest until it has torn and devoured, Until it has drunk the blood of those it has killed."

Num 23:25 Then Balak said to Balaam, "You refuse to curse the people of Israel, but at least don't bless them!"

Num 23:26 Balaam answered, "Didn't I tell you that I had to do everything that the LORD told me?"

Num 23:27 Balak said, "Come with me, and I will take you to another place. Perhaps God will be willing to let you curse them for me from there."

Num 23:28 So he took Balaam to the top of Mount Peor overlooking the desert.

Num 23:29 Balaam said to him, "Build seven altars for me here and bring me seven bulls and seven rams."

Num 23:30 Balak did as he was told, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

Numbers 23:1-30

Numbers 23 - The Prophecy of Balaam

A. The first prophecy.

1. (1-3) Sacrifice and preparation.

Then Balaam said to Balak, "Build seven altars for me here, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams." And Balak did just as Balaam had spoken, and Balak and Balaam offered a bull and a ram on each altar. Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stand by your burnt offering, and I will go; perhaps the LORD will

come to meet me, and whatever He shows me I will tell you.” So he went to a desolate height.

2. (4-6) *God meets Balaam and sends him back to Balak.*

And God met Balaam, and he said to Him, “I have prepared the seven altars, and I have offered on each altar a bull and a ram.” Then the LORD put a word in Balaam’s mouth, and said, “Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak.” So he returned to him, and there he was, standing by his burnt offering, he and all the princes of Moab.

a. **Then the LORD put a word in Balaam’s mouth:**

We might be surprised that God spoke to and through someone as obviously wicked as Balaam. But this shows us that spiritual giftedness does not equal spiritual maturity or holiness of life. God spoke through a donkey in the previous chapter and now He spoke through a bigger donkey.

b. **So he returned to him, and there he was, standing by his burnt offering, he and all the princes of Moab:** When Balaam returned, Balak and all the princes of Moab were ready. They were ready to learn what their money bought them from Balaam.

3. (7-10) *God’s word to Balak through Balaam.*

And he took up his oracle and said:

**“Balak the king of Moab has brought me from Aram,
From the mountains of the east.**

**‘Come, curse Jacob for me,
And come, denounce Israel!’**

**“How shall I curse whom God has not cursed?
And how shall I denounce whom the LORD has not
denounced?**

**For from the top of the rocks I see him,
And from the hills I behold him;**

**There! A people dwelling alone,
Not reckoning itself among the nations.
Who can count the dust of Jacob,
Or number one-fourth of Israel?
Let me die the death of the righteous,
And let my end be like his!"**

- a. **Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel:** God knew exactly what Balak wanted. He wanted a spiritual curse on Israel so that they could be defeated in battle.
- b. **How shall I curse whom God has not cursed?** Yet, Balaam or any other prophet could not curse Israel if God had not cursed them. Therefore, Balak's money was wasted.
- c. **Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number one-fourth of Israel?** Instead, through Balaam God promised to bless Israel by making them a singular nation and blessing them with great size.
- d. **Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!** Balaam concluded his **oracle** (another word for a prophecy) with this longing. Balaam was one of the many who long to die the **death of the righteous** yet have no desire to live the life of the righteous. The two go together.

4. (11-12) *Balak's disappointment.*

Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and look, you have blessed *them* bountifully!" So he answered and said, "Must I not take heed to speak what the LORD has put in my mouth?"

- a. **What have you done to me?** The king of Moab was understandably disturbed. He paid good money for a particular outcome, and it the opposite happened.

b. **Must I not take heed to speak what the LORD has put in my mouth?** Perhaps Balaam was disappointed also. It isn't hard to sense a note of sorrow in this response of his. After all, he wanted to please his employer.

B. The second prophecy.

1. (13-17) Preparation before the prophecy.

Then Balak said to him, "Please come with me to another place from which you may see them; you shall see only the outer part of them, and shall not see them all; curse them for me from there." So he brought him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. And he said to Balak, "Stand here by your burnt offering while I meet the Lord over there." Then the LORD met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, "Go back to Balak, and thus you shall speak." So he came to him, and there he was, standing by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab were with him. And Balak said to him, "What has the LORD spoken?"

2. (18-24) God's second word to Balak through Balaam.

Then he took up his oracle and said:

**"Rise up, Balak, and hear!
Listen to me, son of Zippor!
God is not a man, that He should lie,
Nor a son of man, that He should repent.
Has He said, and will He not do?
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?
Behold, I have received a command to bless;
He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it.
"He has not observed iniquity in Jacob,
Nor has He seen wickedness in Israel.**

**The LORD his God is with him,
And the shout of a King is among them.
God brings them out of Egypt;
He has strength like a wild ox.
"For there is no sorcery against Jacob,
Nor any divination against Israel.
It now must be said of Jacob
And of Israel, 'Oh, what God has done!'
Look, a people rises like a lioness,
And lifts itself up like a lion;
It shall not lie down until it devours the prey,
And drinks the blood of the slain."**

- a. **Rise up Balak, and hear:** In this message, God rebuked Balak, and taught him about the Divine nature, that He is **not a man**, that He does not lie or change His mind, that He always performs His word, and that He has all strength.
- b. **He has not observed iniquity in Jacob nor has He seen wickedness in Israel:** God also taught Balak about the people of God, Israel. He taught them that they were blessed, that they were walking in purity, that God was with Israel, had brought them out of Egypt, had protected them against all sorcery and divination, and that He would see them through to victory.
- c. **He has strength like a wild ox:** The phrase **wild ox** (Num 23:22; Num 24:8) is translated "unicorn" in the KJV. The Hebrew word here (*reem*) occurs nine times in the Old Testament. The idea behind the Hebrew word is either of one horn or a mighty horn. Some think it refers to a rhinoceros, others to a wild ox, or a strong goat. It is not out of the question that a unicorn may be in mind.

3. (25-26) *Balak's disappointment.*

Then Balak said to Balaam, "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all!" So Balaam answered and said

to Balak, "Did I not tell you, saying, 'All that the LORD speaks, that I must do'?"

a. **Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all:**

Balak was very frustrated and essentially said, "If you can't curse them, then at least don't go and bless them!"

Balaam's Third Oracle

Num 24:1 By now Balaam knew that the LORD wanted him to bless the people of Israel, so he did not go to look for omens, as he had done before. He turned toward the desert

Num 24:2 and saw the people of Israel camped tribe by tribe. The spirit of God took control of him,

Num 24:3 and he uttered this prophecy: "The message of Balaam son of Beor, The words of the man who can see clearly,

Num 24:4 Who can hear what God is saying. With staring eyes I see in a trance A vision from Almighty God.

Num 24:5 The tents of Israel are beautiful,

Num 24:6 Like long rows of palms Or gardens beside a river, Like aloes planted by the LORD Or cedars beside the water.

Num 24:7 They will have abundant rainfall And plant their seed in well-watered fields. Their king shall be greater than Agag, And his rule shall be extended far and wide.

Num 24:8 God brought them out of Egypt; He fights for them like a wild ox. They devour their enemies, Crush their bones, smash their arrows.

Num 24:9 The nation is like a mighty lion; When it is sleeping, no one dares wake it. Whoever blesses Israel will be blessed, And whoever curses Israel will be cursed."

Num 24:10 Balak clenched his fists in anger and said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, but three times now you have blessed them instead.

Num 24:11 Now get on home! I promised to reward you, but the LORD has kept you from getting the reward."

Num 24:12 Balaam answered, "I told the messengers you sent to me that

Num 24:13 even if you gave me all the silver and gold in your palace, I could not disobey the command of the LORD by doing anything of myself. I will say only what the LORD tells me to say."

Num 24:14 Balaam said to Balak, "Now I am going back to my own people, but before I go, I am warning you what the people of Israel will do to your people in the future."

Balaam's Final Oracle

Num 24:15 Then he uttered this prophecy: "The message of Balaam son of Beor, The words of the man who can see clearly,

Num 24:16 Who can hear what God is saying And receive the knowledge that comes from the Most High. With staring eyes I see in a trance A vision from Almighty God.

Num 24:17 I look into the future, And I see the nation of Israel. A king, like a bright star, will arise in that nation. Like a comet he will come from Israel. He will strike the leaders of Moab And beat down all the people of Seth.

Num 24:18 He will conquer his enemies in Edom And make their land his property, While Israel continues victorious.

Num 24:19 The nation of Israel will trample them down And wipe out the last survivors."

Num 24:20 Then in his vision Balaam saw the Amalekites and uttered this prophecy: "Amalek was the most powerful nation of all, But at the end it will perish forever."

Num 24:21 In his vision he saw the Kenites, and uttered this prophecy: "The place where you live is secure, Safe as a nest set high on a cliff,

Num 24:22 But you Kenites will be destroyed When Assyria takes you captive."

Num 24:23 Balaam uttered this prophecy: "Who are these people gathering in the north?

Num 24:24 Invaders will sail from Cyprus; They will conquer Assyria and Eber, But they, in turn, will perish forever."

Num 24:25 Then Balaam got ready and went back home, and Balak went on his way.

Numbers 24:1-25

Numbers 24 - The Prophecy of Balaam (continued)

A. The third prophecy.

1. (23:27-24:2) Preparation for the prophecy.

Then Balak said to Balaam, "Please come, I will take you to another place; perhaps it will please God that you may curse them for me from there." So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, that overlooks the wasteland. Then Balaam said to Balak, "Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams." And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bull and a ram on every altar. Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not go as at other times, to seek to use sorcery, but he set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam raised his eyes, and saw Israel encamped according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him.

a. Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams: At the suggestion of Balaam, Balak offered seven bulls and seven rams. By now, he had offered 21 bulls and rams, plus Balaam's pay. This means Balak had a substantial

investment in seeing Israel cursed. This third time, they selected another place to make the prophecy again.

b. **He did not go as at other times, to seek to use sorcery:** Apparently, on the two previous occasions, Balaam *tried* to bring forth a curse on Israel, but he couldn't. Now he stopped using these false and artificial aids, and just let the LORD speak to him.

2. (3-9) *God's third message through Balaam.*

Then he took up his oracle and said:

**"The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor,
The utterance of the man whose eyes are opened,
The utterance of him who hears the words of God,
Who sees the vision of the Almighty,
Who falls down, with eyes wide open:
"How lovely are your tents, O Jacob!
Your dwellings, O Israel!
Like valleys that stretch out,
Like gardens by the riverside,
Like aloes planted by the LORD,
Like cedars beside the waters.
He shall pour water from his buckets,
And his seed *shall be* in many waters.
"His king shall be higher than Agag,
And his kingdom shall be exalted.
"God brings him out of Egypt;
He has strength like a wild ox;
He shall consume the nations, his enemies;
He shall break their bones
And pierce *them* with his arrows.
He bows down, he lies down as a lion;
And as a lion, who shall rouse him?
"Blessed *is* he who blesses you,
And cursed *is* he who curses you."**

a. **How lovely are your tents, O Jacob:** This beautiful prophecy speaks of Israel's blessed abundance, and the dominance over neighbor nations God will give Israel. Most of all, it speaks of the abiding blessing of God on Israel, and directly rebukes Balak for trying to curse Israel (**cursed is he who curses you**).

b. **Blessed is he who blesses you, and cursed is he who curses you:** Each of the first three prophecies, it has gotten worse for Balak. In the first one, Balaam fails to curse Israel; in the second, he blesses Israel, and in the third, he curses Balak! How much worse can it get for the king of Moab?

3. (10-13) *Balak's exasperation with Balaam.*

Then Balak's anger was aroused against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, and look, you have bountifully blessed them these three times! Now therefore, flee to your place. I said I would greatly honor you, but in fact, the LORD has kept you back from honor." So Balaam said to Balak, **"Did I not also speak to your messengers whom you sent to me, saying, 'If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD, to do good or bad of my own will. What the LORD says, that I must speak'?"**

a. **I would greatly honor you, but in fact, the LORD has kept you back from honor:** Balak said that he would not pay Balaam because Balaam would not curse Israel. This hit Balaam where it really hurt him.

b. **The LORD says, that I must speak:** Balaam tried his best to excuse himself, and to blame God. But he knew that his heart's desire (a big paycheck) would not be fulfilled, because he failed to please his employer.

i. Perhaps at that moment Balaam saw the greater wisdom of God in telling him not to go, because now it seemed the whole trip was a big waste, and Balaam would not get his money.

B. The fourth prophecy.

1. (14) *Introduction.*

“And now, indeed, I am going to my people. Come, I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the latter days.”

a. **And now, indeed, I am going to my people:** There was no preparation needed for this prophecy. Since Balak was not going to pay Balaam, Balaam would get back at him with a “free” prophecy, one that would show just how blessed Israel will be - both now and in **the latter days.**

2. (15-24) *God’s fourth message through Balaam.*

So he took up his oracle and said:

**“The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor,
And the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened;
The utterance of him who hears the words of God,
And has the knowledge of the Most High,
Who sees the vision of the Almighty,
Who falls down, with eyes wide open:
“I see Him, but not now;
I behold Him, but not near;
A Star shall come out of Jacob;
A Scepter shall rise out of Israel,
And batter the brow of Moab,
And destroy all the sons of tumult.
And Edom shall be a possession;
Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession,
While Israel does valiantly.**

**Out of Jacob One shall have dominion,
And destroy the remains of the city."**

**Then he looked on Amalek, and he took up his oracle
and said:**

**"Amalek was first among the nations,
But *shall* be last until he perishes."**

**Then he looked on the Kenites, and he took up his
oracle and said:**

**"Firm is your dwelling place,
And your nest is set in the rock;
Nevertheless Kain shall be burned.
How long until Asshur carries you away captive?"**

Then he took up his oracle and said:

**"Alas! Who shall live when God does this?
But ships *shall come* from the coasts of Cyprus,
And they shall afflict Asshur and afflict Eber,
And so shall Amalek, until he perishes."**

a. I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel: This passage is a beautiful prophecy of the coming Messiah. Balaam could **see Him, but not now.**

i. Jesus is here prophetically called **a Star and a Scepter**; He is glorious like a star, and has all authority to rule, as pictured by a scepter.

b. And batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult: The Messiah will eventually rule over all nations that surround Israel. Here God spoke about the neighboring nations of Israel (Moab, Edom, Amalek, and the Kenites) and their future through Balaam.

3. (25) Balaam and Balak depart.

So Balaam rose and departed and returned to his place; Balak also went his way.

- a. **So Balaam rose and departed:** Undoubtedly, both were disappointed and perhaps angry, each because Israel had not been weakened spiritually and therefore made ready for defeat in battle. Balak wanted Israel defeated, and Balaam wanted Balak's money, but each wanted Israel spiritually cursed as a way to get it, and God would not curse Israel.
- b. **Balak also went his way:** We must credit Balak for one thing; he knew where the strength of Israel was. He did not seek to defeat Israel through military strategy or new weapons. He knew it was a spiritual battle, and if Israel won the spiritual battle, they would certainly win the military battle.
 - i. We should walk in the same awareness. If we did, we would give more time and attention to building our spiritual strength, in having a close walk with Jesus. We should not allow Balak to be more perceptive about spiritual things than we are.

Baal Worship at Peor

Num 25:1 When the Israelites were camped at Acacia Valley, the men began to have sexual intercourse with the Moabite women who were there.

Num 25:2 These women invited them to sacrificial feasts, where the god of Moab was worshiped. The Israelites ate the food and worshiped the god

Num 25:3 Baal of Peor. So the LORD was angry with them

Num 25:4 and said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of Israel and, in obedience to me, execute them in broad daylight, and then I will no longer be angry with the people."

Num 25:5 Moses said to the officials, "Each of you is to kill every man in your tribe who has become a worshiper of

Baal of Peor."

Num 25:6 One of the Israelites took a Midianite woman into his tent in the sight of Moses and the whole community, while they were mourning at the entrance of the Tent of the LORD's presence.

Num 25:7 When Phinehas, the son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron the priest, saw this, he got up and left the assembly. He took a spear,

Num 25:8 followed the man and the woman into the tent, and drove the spear through both of them. In this way the epidemic that was destroying Israel was stopped,

Num 25:9 but it had already killed twenty-four thousand people.

The Zeal of Phinehas

Num 25:10 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 25:11 "Because of what Phinehas has done, I am no longer angry with the people of Israel. He refused to tolerate the worship of any god but me, and that is why I did not destroy them in my anger.

Num 25:12 So tell him that I am making a covenant with him that is valid for all time to come.

Num 25:13 He and his descendants are permanently established as priests, because he did not tolerate any rivals to me and brought about forgiveness for the people's sin."

Num 25:14 The name of the Israelite who was killed with the Midianite woman was Zimri son of Salu, the head of a family in the tribe of Simeon.

Num 25:15 The woman's name was Cozbi. Zur, her father, was chief of a group of Midianite clans.

Num 25:16 The LORD commanded Moses,

Num 25:17 "Attack the Midianites and destroy them,

Num 25:18 because of the evil they did to you when they deceived you at Peor, and because of Cozbi, who was killed

at the time of the epidemic at Peor."

Numbers 25:1-18

Numbers 25 - Israel's Sin with Moab

A. Sexual immorality, idolatry, and the aftermath.

1. (1-3) Israel's harlotry with the women of Moab.

Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.

a. **And the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab:** The women of Moab, coming among the men of Israel, seduced them to both sexual sin and idolatry (**and bowed down to their gods**). The two were commonly connected in perverse forms of idol worship in the ancient world.

i. In this chapter, the women and their people are sometimes described as Midianites and sometimes as Moabites. This is because the Midianites were a nomadic group, and at this time, were in high numbers among the Moabites.

b. **Israel was joined to Baal of Peor:** Baal was the great Canaanite fertility god, and the worship of Baal was a constant enticement for the children of Israel. Balaam prophesied from *the high places of Baal* (Num 22:41), possibly from this same place - Baal Peor.

c. **The anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel:** Balak could never pay enough money to Balaam to make God curse Israel. In the previous chapter, Balaam tried to curse Israel and could not; but now, they are cursed because of their sin against the LORD.

- i. We learn later in the chapter that **the anger of the LORD** showed itself in a plague that began to strike down thousands among Israel and seemed as if it would continue until the whole nation was consumed.
- ii. What an enemy could never accomplish against Israel, Israel did to itself through disobedience. The same principle works among the people of God today. The mightiest attack of Satan against us can never do as much damage as our own sin and rebellion against the LORD.
- iii. "The sword of no stranger, the curse of no stranger had the power to damage Israel. Only it itself could bring misfortune, by seceding from God and his Law." (Rabbi Hirsch, cited in Allen).
- iv. "The Moabites being now neighbours to the Israelites, and finding themselves unable to effect their design against Israel by war and witchcraft, they now fell another way to work." (Poole) In the same way, Satan's violence and sorcery can have no lasting influence on the believer; but if he can lead us into sin, we can be destroyed.

d. **The anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel:** Balaam had done his best to curse Israel - but was unsuccessful. Yet, his love for money wouldn't let the matter end without pleasing the man who hired him, the king of Moab.

- i. 2Pe 2:15-16 speaks of Balaam and his love of money, using him as an example of later false prophets: *They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.*

ii. Rev 2:14 makes the connection between Balaam's unsuccessful attempt to curse Israel and this subsequent idolatry: *But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.*

iii. Essentially, after his failure to curse Israel, Balaam said to Balak: "I cannot curse these people. But you can get them to curse themselves through enticing them to rebel against their God. Send your prettiest girls among them and tell them to entice the men of Israel to immorality and idolatry." And it worked.

iv. Balaam, through his wicked counsel to Balak, got what he wanted - but he also ended up dead among the enemies of God (Num 31:7-8). He only enjoyed his money for a short time.

2. (4-5) God's judgment on the offenders.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the LORD, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor."

a. **Take all the leaders and the people and hang the offenders before the LORD:** God thought it important that the offenders be judged openly; this was not sin to keep hidden. Open sin had to be dealt with openly.

b. **Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor:** When sin such as this is tolerated or even approved in a culture, it is a sure sign of decay, and Moses wouldn't accept that decay. He commanded the

community to bring the offenders to be judged, to show they would not accept this kind of sin in their midst.

B. A flagrant sin judged.

1. (6-9) *Phinehas' stand for righteousness stops God's angry plague.*

And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand; and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.

a. **Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose from among the congregation:** Phinehas was one among those in Israel who would not accept this wholesale rebellion against God. He brought God's judgment by thrusting through an Israelite man and a Midianite woman with a spear - seemingly, as they were in the midst of immorality.

i. Allen believes this man was having sex with the Midianite woman right in front of the tabernacle, and the text deliberately obscures this, because it is so offensive.

b. **So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel:** Phinehas was probably not the only one to make such a stand for righteousness. But his was the singular act that stopped the plague. We may think our

particular stand for righteousness makes no difference in the awesome tide of sin around us; but God can honor just one righteous act and cause it to make the difference.

c. **Twenty-four thousand:** This many died in the plague. This must have delighted Balak, king of Moab. He knew that Balaam succeeded in cursing Israel - or, rather, in getting them to curse themselves.

2. (10-13) *God honors Phinehas for his zeal.*

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.'"

a. **Because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal:** It wasn't only Phinehas' obedience God noticed. He was also noticed because **he was zealous with My zeal among them.** Phinehas was passionate about the things God was passionate about, and in this respect, he was a man after God's own heart.

b. **It shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood:** God blessed Phinehas with the promise that he would be the descendant of Aaron through which the priesthood passed.

i. This was fitting, because it was the zeal of Phinehas that **made atonement for the children of Israel,**

just as a priest should be the one ministering atonement.

3. (14-18) *God commands Israel to harass and attack the Midianites.*

Now the name of the Israelite who was killed, who was killed with the Midianite woman, was Zimri the son of Salu, a leader of a father's house among the Simeonites. And the name of the Midianite woman who was killed was Cozbi the daughter of Zur; he was head of the people of a father's house in Midian. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Harass the Midianites, and attack them; for they harassed you with their schemes by which they seduced you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister, who was killed in the day of the plague because of Peor."

a. **Harass the Midianites, and attack them; for they harassed you with their schemes by which they seduced you in the matter of Peor:** They were to show no tolerance towards that which brought the sin in their midst and turned their hearts away from God. They were to battle against the Midianites every opportunity they had.

Census of the New Generation

Num 26:1 After the epidemic the LORD said to Moses and Eleazar son of Aaron,

Num 26:2 "Take a census by families of the whole community of Israel, of all men twenty years old or older who are fit for military service."

Num 26:3 (3-4) Moses and Eleazar obeyed and called together all the men of that age group. They assembled in the plains of Moab across the Jordan River from Jericho. These were the Israelites who came out of Egypt:

Num 26:5 The tribe of Reuben (Reuben was the oldest son of Jacob): the clans of Hanoch, Pallu,

Num 26:6 Hezron, and Carmi.

Num 26:7 These clans numbered 43,730 men.

Num 26:8 The descendants of Pallu were Eliab

Num 26:9 and his sons Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. (These are the Dathan and Abiram who were chosen by the community. They defied Moses and Aaron and joined the followers of Korah when they rebelled against the LORD.)

Num 26:10 The ground opened and swallowed them, and they died with Korah and his followers when fire destroyed 250 men; they became a warning to the people.

Num 26:11 But the sons of Korah were not killed.)

Num 26:12 The tribe of Simeon: the clans of Nemuel, Jamin, Jachin,

Num 26:13 Zerah, and Shaul.

Num 26:14 These clans numbered 22,200 men.

Num 26:15 The tribe of Gad: the clans of Zephon, Haggi, Shuni,

Num 26:16 Ozni, Eri,

Num 26:17 Arod, and Areli.

Num 26:18 These clans numbered 40,500 men.

Num 26:19 (19-21) The tribe of Judah: the clans of Shelah, Perez, Zerah, Hezron, and Hamul. (Two of Judah's sons, Er and Onan, had died in the land of Canaan.)

Num 26:22 These clans numbered 76,500 men.

Num 26:23 The tribe of Issachar: the clans of Tola, Puah,

Num 26:24 Jashub, and Shimron.

Num 26:25 These clans numbered 64,300 men.

Num 26:26 The tribe of Zebulun: the clans of Sered, Elon, and Jahleel.

Num 26:27 These clans numbered 60,500 men.

Num 26:28 The tribes of Joseph, who was the father of two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

Num 26:29 The tribe of Manasseh. Machir son of Manasseh was the father of Gilead, and the following clans traced their ancestry to Gilead:

Num 26:30 the clans of Iezer, Helek,

Num 26:31 Asriel, Shechem,

Num 26:32 Shemida, and Hepher.

Num 26:33 Zelophehad son of Hepher had no sons, but only daughters; their names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.

Num 26:34 These clans numbered 52,700 men.

Num 26:35 The tribe of Ephraim: the clans of Shuthelah, Becher, and Tahan.

Num 26:36 The clan of Eran traced its descent from Shuthelah.

Num 26:37 These clans numbered 32,500 men. These are the clans descended from Joseph.

Num 26:38 The tribe of Benjamin: the clans of Bela, Ashbel, Ahiram,

Num 26:39 Shephupham, and Hupham.

Num 26:40 The clans of Ard and Naaman traced their descent from Bela.

Num 26:41 These clans numbered 45,600 men.

Num 26:42 The tribe of Dan: the clan of Shuham,

Num 26:43 which numbered 64,400 men.

Num 26:44 The tribe of Asher: the clans of Imnah, Ishvi, and Beriah.

Num 26:45 The clans of Heber and Malchiel traced their descent from Beriah.

Num 26:46 Asher had a daughter named Serah.

Num 26:47 These clans numbered 53,400 men.

Num 26:48 The tribe of Naphtali: the clans of Jahzeel, Guni,

Num 26:49 Jezer, and Shillem.

Num 26:50 These clans numbered 45,400 men.

Num 26:51 The total number of the Israelite men was 601,730.

Num 26:52 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 26:53 "Divide the land among the tribes, according to their size.

Num 26:54 (54-56) Divide the land by drawing lots, and give a large share to a large tribe and a small one to a small tribe."

Num 26:57 The tribe of Levi consisted of the clans of Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

Num 26:58 Their descendants included the subclans of Libni, Hebron, Mahli, Mushi, and Korah. Kohath was the father of Amram,

Num 26:59 who was married to Levi's daughter Jochebed, who was born in Egypt. She bore Amram two sons, Aaron and Moses, and a daughter, Miriam.

Num 26:60 Aaron had four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

Num 26:61 Nadab and Abihu died when they offered unholy fire to the LORD.

Num 26:62 The male Levites who were one month old or older numbered 23,000. They were listed separately from the rest of the Israelites, because they were not given any property in Israel.

Num 26:63 All these clans were listed by Moses and Eleazar when they took a census of the Israelites in the plains of Moab across the Jordan River from Jericho.

Num 26:64 There was not even one man left among those whom Moses and Aaron had listed in the first census in the

Sinai Desert.

Num 26:65 The LORD had said that all of them would die in the wilderness, and except for Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun they all did.

Numbers 26:1-65

Numbers 26 - The Second Census

A. The second census of Israel in the wilderness.

1. (1-4) The command to take the census.

And it came to pass, after the plague, that the LORD spoke to Moses and Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying: "Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel from twenty years old and above, by their fathers' houses, all who are able to go to war in Israel." So Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying: "Take a census of the people from twenty years old and above, just as the LORD commanded Moses and the children of Israel who came out of the land of Egypt."

a. Take a census of all the congregation of the

children of Israel: Some 38 years earlier, at the

beginning of the Book of Numbers, while Israel still camped at Mount Sinai, God commanded them to take a census.

i. The first census was primarily for military organization. If they were to enter into and take possession of the Promised Land, they had to know how many troops they had, and how they should best be organized.

b. All who are able to go to war in Israel: The

purpose of the second census was also made clear. They were to count those able to fight on behalf of Israel. This accounting, 38 years later, was again for military organization.

i. 38 years before Israel was *organized* enough; they just did not have enough *faith* to take the Promised

Land. Organization is good, and the work of God can suffer from a lack of it; but the *best* organization can never replace bold trust in God.

2. (5-11) *The tribe of Reuben.*

Reuben was the firstborn of Israel. The children of Reuben were: of Hanoch, the family of the Hanochites; of Pallu, the family of the Palluites; of Hezron, the family of the Hezronites; of Carmi, the family of the Carmites. These are the families of the Reubenites: those who were numbered of them were forty-three thousand seven hundred and thirty. And the son of Pallu was Eliab. The sons of Eliab were Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. These are the Dathan and Abiram, representatives of the congregation, who contended against Moses and Aaron in the company of Korah, when they contended against the LORD; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up together with Korah when that company died, when the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men; and they became a sign. Nevertheless the children of Korah did not die.

a. **The children of Reuben were:** In the first census, Reuben counted 46,500 men ready for war; 38 years later, they counted 43,730 - a loss of 2,770 men (6%).

b. **These are the Dathan and Abiram, representatives of the congregation, who contended against Moses:** Notable in the tribe of Reuben were **Dathan and Abiram**, who were co-leaders with Korah in the rebellion against the LORD and Moses described in Numbers 16. Perhaps one reason Dathan and Abiram resented Moses' leadership was because they were from the tribe of Israel's firstborn son (Reuben); yet Moses, descended from Levi (a younger son) was the leader of the nation.

i. **And they became a sign:** God's judgment of Dathan, Abiram, Korah and their followers in Numbers 16 surely was a sign, both to the generation in the wilderness and beyond.

3. (12-14) The tribe of Simeon.

The sons of Simeon according to their families were: of Nemuel, the family of the Nemuelites; of Jamin, the family of the Jaminites; of Jachin, the family of the Jachinites; of Zerah, the family of the Zarhites; of Shaul, the family of the Shaulites. These are the families of the Simeonites: twenty-two thousand two hundred.

a. **The sons of Simeon:** In the first census, the tribe of Simeon counted 59,300 men ready for war; 38 years later, they counted 22,200. This was staggering loss of 37,100 men for this once-great tribe (a loss of 63%).

4. (15-18) The tribe of Gad.

The sons of Gad according to their families were: of Zephon, the family of the Zephonites; of Haggi, the family of the Haggites; of Shuni, the family of the Shunites; of Ozni, the family of the Oznites; of Eri, the family of the Erites; of Arod, the family of the Arodites; of Areli, the family of the Areliites. These are the families of the sons of Gad according to those who were numbered of them: forty thousand five hundred.

a. **The sons of Gad:** In the first census, the tribe of Gad counted 45,650 men ready for war; 38 years later, they count 40,500. This was a loss of 5,150 fighting men (11%).

5. (19-22) The tribe of Judah.

The sons of Judah were Er and Onan; and Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Judah

according to their families were: of Shelah, the family of the Shelanites; of Perez, the family of the Parzites; of Zerah, the family of the Zarhites. And the sons of Perez were: of Hezron, the family of the Hezronites; of Hamul, the family of the Hamulites. These are the families of Judah according to those who were numbered of them: seventy-six thousand five hundred.

a. **The sons of Judah:** In the first census, the tribe of Judah counted 74,600 men ready for war; 38 years later, they counted 76,500. This was a gain of 1,900 (3%).

6. (23-25) *The tribe of Issachar.*

The sons of Issachar according to their families were: of Tola, the family of the Tolaites; of Puah, the family of the Punites; of Jashub, the family of the Jashubites; of Shimron, the family of the Shimronites. These are the families of Issachar according to those who were numbered of them: sixty-four thousand three hundred.

a. **The sons of Issachar:** In the first census, the tribe of Issachar counted 54,400 men ready for war; 38 years later, they counted 64,300. This was a gain of 9,900 (18%).

7. (26-27) *The tribe of Zebulun.*

The sons of Zebulun according to their families were: of Sered, the family of the Sardites; of Elon, the family of the Elonites; of Jahleel, the family of the Jahleelites. These are the families of the Zebulunites according to those who were numbered of them: sixty thousand five hundred.

a. **The sons of Zebulun:** In the first census, the tribe of Zebulun counted 57,400 men ready for war; 38 years

later, they counted 60,500. This was a gain of 3,100 (5%).

8. (28-34) *The tribe of Manasseh.*

The sons of Joseph according to their families, by Manasseh and Ephraim, were: The sons of Manasseh: of Machir, the family of the Machirites; and Machir begot Gilead; of Gilead, the family of the Gileadites. These are the sons of Gilead: of Jeezer, the family of the Jeezerites; of Helek, the family of the Helekites; of Asriel, the family of the Asrielites; of Shechem, the family of the Shechemites; of Shemida, the family of the Shemidaites; of Hepher, the family of the Hepherites. Now Zelophehad the son of Hepher had no sons, but daughters; and the names of the daughters of Zelophehad were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. These are the families of Manasseh; and those who were numbered of them were fifty-two thousand seven hundred.

a. **The sons of Manasseh:** In the first census, the tribe of Manasseh counted 32,200 ready for war; 38 years later, they counted 52,700. This was a remarkable gain of 20,500 (64%).

9. (35-37) *The tribe of Ephraim.*

These are the sons of Ephraim according to their families: of Shuthelah, the family of the Shuthalhites; of Becher, the family of the Bachrites; of Tahan, the family of the Tahanites. And these are the sons of Shuthelah: of Eran, the family of the Eranites. These are the families of the sons of Ephraim according to those who were numbered of them: thirty-two thousand five hundred. These are the sons of Joseph according to their families.

a. **These are the sons of Ephraim:** In the first census, the tribe of Ephraim counted 40,500 ready for war; 38 years later, they counted 32,500. This was a loss of 8,000 men (20%).

10. (38-41) The tribe of Benjamin.

The sons of Benjamin according to their families were: of Bela, the family of the Belaites; of Ashbel, the family of the Ashbelites; of Ahiram, the family of the Ahiramites; of Shupham, the family of the Shuphamites; of Hupham, the family of the Huphamites. And the sons of Bela were Ard and Naaman: of Ard, the family of the Ardites; of Naaman, the family of the Naamites. These are the sons of Benjamin according to their families; and those who were numbered of them were forty-five thousand six hundred.

a. **The sons of Benjamin:** In the first census, the tribe of Benjamin counted 35,400 men ready for war; 38 years later, they counted 45,600. This was a gain of 10,200 men (29%).

11. (42-43) The tribe of Dan.

These are the sons of Dan according to their families: of Shuham, the family of the Shuhamites. These are the families of Dan according to their families. All the families of the Shuhamites, according to those who were numbered of them, were sixty-four thousand four hundred.

a. **These are the sons of Dan:** In the first census, the tribe of Dan counted 62,700 men ready for war; 38 years later, they counted 64,400. This was a gain of 1,700 men (3%).

12. (44-47) The tribe of Asher.

The sons of Asher according to their families were: of Jimna, the family of the Jimnites; of Jesui, the family of the Jesuites; of Beriah, the family of the Beriites. Of the sons of Beriah: of Heber, the family of the Heberites; of Malchiel, the family of the Malchielites. And the name of the daughter of Asher was Serah. These are the families of the sons of Asher according to those who were numbered of them: fifty-three thousand four hundred.

- a. **The sons of Asher:** In the first census, the tribe of Asher counted 41,500 men ready for war; 38 years later, they counted 53,400 men. This was a gain of 11,900 (29%).

13. (48-50) The tribe of Naphtali.

The sons of Naphtali according to their families were: of Jahzeel, the family of the Jahzeelites; of Guni, the family of the Gunites; of Jezer, the family of the Jezerites; of Shillem, the family of the Shillemites. These are the families of Naphtali according to their families; and those who were numbered of them were forty-five thousand four hundred.

- a.

The sons of Naphtali: In the first census, the tribe of Naphtali counted 53,400 men ready for war; 38 years later, they counted 45,400 men. This was a loss of 8,000 (15%).

14. (51) The total number of men ready for war among Israel.

These are those who were numbered of the children of Israel: six hundred and one thousand seven hundred and thirty.

- a. **These are those who were numbered:** In the first census, Israel counted 603,550 men ready for war; 38

years later, they count 601,730 men - a loss of 1,820 men (.3%).

b. **Six hundred and one thousand seven hundred and thirty:** So, the total number of men ready for war during the wilderness stayed virtually the same over the 38-year period, when the generation of unbelief died in the wilderness.

i. The stagnation of population is reflective of Israel's spiritual state during these 38 years - we should have expected them to grow, as is normal in the course of generations. Instead, they simply stayed where they were. The 38 years in the wilderness were years of no growth, no advance - just going in circles until the generation of unbelief had died and a generation of faith had arisen, a generation bold enough to take the Promised Land.

c. **Numbered of the children of Israel:** During this period, certain tribes suffered significant gains, and certain tribes suffered significant losses.

i. Of these twelve tribes of Israel, five suffered loss, and seven gained men. Half of the tribes had gains or losses 15% or less; but Simeon lost 63% of their population, and Manasseh gained 64%. God was blessing or cursing particular tribes, no doubt related to their abiding with Him.

Tribes of Israel - First and Second Census (Numbers 1, 26)

TRIBE	BEFORE	AFTER	CHANGE	PERCENT
Reuben	46,500	43,730	-2,770	-6%
Simeon	59,300	22,200	-37,100	-63%

Gad	45,650	40,500	-5,150	-11%
Judah	74,600	76,500	+1,900	+3%
Issachar	54,400	64,300	+9,900	+18%
Zebulun	57,400	60,500	+3,100	+5%
Manasseh	32,200	52,700	+20,500	+64%
Ephraim	40,500	32,500	-8,000	-20%
Benjamin	35,400	45,600	+10,200	+29%
Dan	62,700	64,400	+1,700	+3%
Asher	41,500	53,400	+11,900	+29%
Naphtali	53,400	45,400	-8,000	-15%
Levi	Not counted	Not counted		
Total	603,550	601,730	-1,820	-0.3%

B. Inheritance of the land.

1. (52-56) *The general principle of inheritance: Larger tribes receive larger portions of land.*

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "To these the land shall be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names. To a large tribe you shall give a larger inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a smaller inheritance. Each shall be given its

inheritance according to those who were numbered of them. But the land shall be divided by lot; they shall inherit according to the names of the tribes of their fathers. According to the lot their inheritance shall be divided between the larger and the smaller."

2. (57-62) The tribe of Levi and their inheritance.

And these are those who were numbered of the Levites according to their families: of Gershon, the family of the Gershonites; of Kohath, the family of the Kohathites; of Merari, the family of the Merarites. These are the families of the Levites: the family of the Libnites, the family of the Hebronites, the family of the Mahlites, the family of the Mushites, and the family of the Korathites. And Kohath begot Amram. The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and to Amram she bore Aaron and Moses and their sister Miriam. To Aaron were born Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. And Nadab and Abihu died when they offered profane fire before the LORD. Now those who were numbered of them were twenty-three thousand, every male from a month old and above; for they were not numbered among the other children of Israel, because there was no inheritance given to them among the children of Israel.

a. For they were not numbered among the other children of Israel: The Levites were not numbered in either the first or second census, because the men of their tribe were not to go to war.

b. Because there was no inheritance given to them among the children of Israel: As well, they were to receive no inheritance of land as the other tribes; their inheritance was greater than property - the LORD Himself (Num 18:20).

3. (63-65) *The old generation has no inheritance.*

These are those who were numbered by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who numbered the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho. But among these there was not a man of those who were numbered by Moses and Aaron the priest when they numbered the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Sinai. For the LORD had said of them, "They shall surely die in the wilderness." So there was not left a man of them, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.

a. **But among these there was not a man of those who were numbered by Moses and Aaron:** None of those counted in the first census were counted in the second. That was the old generation, the generation of unbelief, who perished in the wilderness. They obviously had no inheritance in the Promised Land (except of Caleb and Joshua).

The Daughters of Zelophehad

Num 27:1 Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah were the daughters of Zelophehad son of Hepher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, son of Joseph.

Num 27:2 They went and stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders, and the whole community at the entrance of the Tent of the LORD's presence and said,

Num 27:3 "Our father died in the wilderness without leaving any sons. He was not among the followers of Korah, who rebelled against the LORD; he died because of his own sin.

Num 27:4 Just because he had no sons, why should our father's name disappear from Israel? Give us property among our father's relatives."

Num 27:5 Moses presented their case to the LORD,

Num 27:6 and the LORD said to him,

Num 27:7 "What the daughters of Zelophehad request is right; give them property among their father's relatives. Let his inheritance pass on to them.

Num 27:8 Tell the people of Israel that whenever a man dies without leaving a son, his daughter is to inherit his property.

Num 27:9 If he has no daughter, his brothers are to inherit it.

Num 27:10 If he has no brothers, his father's brothers are to inherit it.

Num 27:11 If he has no brothers or uncles, then his nearest relative is to inherit it and hold it as his own property. The people of Israel are to observe this as a legal requirement, just as I, the LORD, have commanded you."

Joshua to Succeed Moses

Num 27:12 The LORD said to Moses, "Go up the Abarim Mountains and look out over the land that I am giving to the Israelites.

Num 27:13 After you have seen it, you will die, as your brother Aaron did,

Num 27:14 because both of you rebelled against my command in the wilderness of Zin. When the whole community complained against me at Meribah, you refused to acknowledge my holy power before them." (Meribah is the spring at Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.)

Num 27:15 Moses prayed,

Num 27:16 " LORD God, source of all life, appoint, I pray, a man who can lead the people

Num 27:17 and can command them in battle, so that your community will not be like sheep without a shepherd."

Num 27:18 The LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a capable man, and place your hands on his head.

Num 27:19 Have him stand in front of Eleazar the priest and the whole community, and there before them all proclaim him as your successor.

Num 27:20 Give him some of your own authority, so that the whole community of Israel will obey him.

Num 27:21 He will depend on Eleazar the priest, who will learn my will by using the Urim and Thummim. In this way Eleazar will direct Joshua and the whole community of Israel in all their affairs."

Num 27:22 Moses did as the LORD had commanded him. He had Joshua stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole community.

Num 27:23 As the LORD had commanded, Moses put his hands on Joshua's head and proclaimed him as his successor.

Numbers 27:1-23

Numbers 27 - Inheritance and the Next Leader

A. The case of Zelophehad's daughters.

1. (1-5) The request of Zelophehad's daughters.

Then came the daughters of Zelophehad the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, from the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph; and these were the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. And they stood before Moses, before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation, by the doorway of the tabernacle of meeting, saying: "Our father died in the wilderness; but he was not in the company of those who gathered together against the LORD, in company with Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he

had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers." So Moses brought their case before the LORD.

a. **Then came the daughters of Zelophehad:**

Normally, the land inheritance should be passed from a father to his sons in Israel, not to the daughters. What then in the case of Zelophehad's daughters, whose father had no sons? Will their father's inheritance simply be assumed by someone else, or will his name live on through his inheritance?

i. In generally, the system was not completely unfair to women. A woman received a dowry from her father as a wedding present. Typically, the father required his potential son-in-law to provide much if not all of the dowry. A dowry might consist of clothes, jewelry, money, furniture or more, and it was thought that the dowry could help provide for the woman if her husband left her or unexpectedly died.

b. **So Moses brought their case before the LORD:**

Moses did what he should when faced with a new situation: He sought God.

2. (6-11) *The settlement.*

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "The daughters of Zelophehad speak what is right; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them. And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his

inheritance to the relative closest him in his family, and he shall possess it.” And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, just as the LORD commanded Moses.

a. **The daughters of Zelophehad speak what is right:** God seemed pleased that the daughters of Zelophehad brought this issue before Moses. God declared that if a father had no sons, the inheritance then could go to the daughters.

i. “Allowing daughters to inherit, where there were no sons in the family, created another problem though. When they married, they would take the family land with them, thus destroying the father’s estate. To deal with this, chapter 36 brings in additional rules governing the marriage of heiresses.” (Wenham)

b. **If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers:** However, if there were no daughters, the inheritance then went to the father’s brothers. If there were no brothers, the inheritance went to the next of kin.

c. **And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment:** The remarkable thing about these laws is that they were all made in anticipation - in faith - of coming into the inheritance of land in the Canaan. This was a real issue - at this time - for the daughters of Zelophehad shows they were real women of faith, concerned about dividing up what they did not yet have in their hands, but knew they would possess by faith.

B. The passing of Moses and the appointment of a new leader.

1. (12-14) *God tells Moses of his coming death.*

Now the LORD said to Moses: “Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the

children of Israel. And when you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered. For in the Wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes.” (These are the waters of Meribah, at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin.)

a. **You also shall be gathered to your people:** Moses was first told he would die before coming to the Promised Land in Numbers 20. It was still many months until Moses would climb to the top of the mountain, able to see the Promised Land but not able enter it and die there (Deuteronomy 34). Yet God told him of it here, so as to prepare his heart for the right time.

2. (15-17) *Moses' response to God's announcement.*

Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying: “Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.”

a. **Let the LORD... set a man over the congregation:** After hearing of his coming fate, Moses does not try to talk God out of it or complain - his only concern seems to be for the congregation, for the people, not for himself.

b. **That the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd:** Sheep without a shepherd are in constant danger; they face slim provisions of food and water, and they are never led to where they should be. God still wants His sheep to have a shepherd!

i. In the ultimate sense, this is fulfilled by Jesus Christ, who is the Good Shepherd, as was prophesied

in the Old Testament (Mic 5:2-4), and revealed in the New Testament: *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.* (Joh 10:11)

ii. In an additional sense, this is also fulfilled by the New Testament office of *pastor-teacher* - because the Greek word for *pastor* is the word for *shepherd* (Act 20:28, 1Pe 5:2). As 1Pe 5:4 puts it, Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, and pastors are under-shepherds.

iii. The job of shepherds is simple: To feed (Joh 21:15-17), and to lead; to *lead them out and bring them in*, that is, to give guidance and direction for the sheep to follow.

iv. Jesus was also moved with compassion when He saw the people as sheep without a shepherd (Mar 6:34); Moses is showing the nature of Jesus by his concern.

3. (18-23) *Joshua chosen and given authority.*

And the LORD said to Moses: "Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom *is* the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give *some* of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the LORD for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him; all the congregation." So Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation.

And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.

- a. **Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him:** Up to this point, Joshua was mostly known by his servant-like association with Moses (Exo 24:13). That time as Moses' humble servant prepared him to take the leadership he was now called to.
- b. **And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him:** This public presentation and laying of hands on Joshua was important. It let the whole nation know that Joshua was now the leader and the nation should expect to follow him.

Daily Offerings

Num 28:1 The LORD commanded Moses

Num 28:2 to instruct the Israelites to present to God at the appointed times the required food offerings that are pleasing to him.

Num 28:3 These are the food offerings that are to be presented to the LORD: for the daily burnt offering, two one-year-old male lambs without any defects.

Num 28:4 Offer the first lamb in the morning, and the second in the evening,

Num 28:5 each with a grain offering of 2 pounds of flour, mixed with 2 pints of the best olive oil.

Num 28:6 This is the daily offering that is completely burned, which was first offered at Mount Sinai as a food offering, an odor pleasing to the LORD.

Num 28:7 As the wine offering with the first lamb, pour out at the altar 2 pints of wine.

Num 28:8 In the evening offer the second lamb in the same way as the morning offering, together with its wine

offering. It also is a food offering, an odor pleasing to the LORD.

Sabbath Offerings

Num 28:9 On the Sabbath day offer two one-year-old male lambs without any defects, 4 pounds of flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering, and the wine offering.

Num 28:10 This burnt offering is to be offered every Sabbath in addition to the daily offering with its wine offering.

Monthly Offerings

Num 28:11 Present a burnt offering to the LORD at the beginning of each month: two young bulls, one ram, seven one-year-old male lambs, all without any defects.

Num 28:12 As a grain offering, offer flour mixed with olive oil: with each bull, 6 pounds of flour; with the ram, 4 pounds;

Num 28:13 and with each lamb, 2 pounds. These burnt offerings are food offerings, an odor pleasing to the LORD.

Num 28:14 The proper wine offering is 4 pints of wine with each bull, 3 pints with the ram, and 2 pints with each lamb. This is the regulation for the burnt offering for the first day of each month throughout the year.

Num 28:15 And in addition to the daily burnt offering with its wine offering, offer one male goat as a sin offering.

Passover Offerings

Num 28:16 The Passover Festival in honor of the LORD is to be held on the fourteenth day of the first month.

Num 28:17 On the fifteenth day a religious festival begins which lasts seven days, during which only bread prepared without yeast is to be eaten.

Num 28:18 On the first day of the festival you are to gather for worship, and no work is to be done.

Num 28:19 Offer a burnt offering as a food offering to the LORD: two young bulls, one ram, and seven one-year-old male lambs, all without any defects.

Num 28:20 Offer the proper grain offering of flour mixed with olive oil: 6 pounds with each bull, 4 pounds with the ram,

Num 28:21 and 2 pounds with each lamb.

Num 28:22 Also offer one male goat as a sin offering, and in this way perform the ritual of purification for the people.

Num 28:23 Offer these in addition to the regular morning burnt offering.

Num 28:24 In the same way, for seven days offer to the LORD a food offering, an odor pleasing to him. Offer this in addition to the daily burnt offering and wine offering.

Num 28:25 Meet for worship on the seventh day and do no work.

Offerings for the Feast of Weeks

Num 28:26 On the first day of the Harvest Festival, when you present the offering of new grain to the LORD, you are to gather for worship, and no work is to be done.

Num 28:27 Offer a burnt offering as an odor pleasing to the LORD: two young bulls, one ram, and seven one-year-old male lambs, all without any defects.

Num 28:28 Offer the proper grain offering of flour mixed with olive oil: 6 pounds with each bull, 4 pounds with the ram,

Num 28:29 and 2 pounds with each lamb.

Num 28:30 Also offer one male goat as a sin offering, and in this way perform the ritual of purification for the people.

Num 28:31 Offer these and the wine offering in addition to the daily burnt offering and grain offering.

Numbers 28:1-31

Numbers 28 - The Sacrificial System

A. Offerings related to time periods.

1. (1-8) The morning and evening offering.

Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Command the children of Israel, and say to them, 'My offering, My food for My offerings made by fire as a sweet aroma to Me, you shall be careful to offer to Me at their appointed time.' And you shall say to them, 'This is the offering made by fire which you shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs in their first year without blemish, day by day, as a regular burnt offering. The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, and one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering mixed with one-fourth of a hin of pressed oil. 'It is a regular burnt offering which was ordained at Mount Sinai for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD. And its drink offering shall be one-fourth of a hin for each lamb; in a holy place you shall pour out the drink to the LORD as an offering. The other lamb you shall offer in the evening; as the morning grain offering and its drink offering, you shall offer it as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD."

a. Day by day, as a regular burnt offering: Israel was commanded to bring a male lamb to the LORD every morning and every evening. Each day began and ended with this statement of the need for atonement by sacrifice and expression of devotion to the LORD.

b. You shall offer in the morning... you shall offer in the evening: This reminds us that it is appropriate to begin and end our day with a statement of trust in God's atonement and expression of our devotion to Him.

i. We should be like the Psalmist and seek the LORD in the morning: *My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up.* (Psa 5:3) *But to You I have cried out, O LORD, and in the morning my prayer comes before You.* (Psa 88:13)

ii. We should be like the Psalmist and seek the LORD in the evening: *When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches.* (Psa 63:6) *Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.* (Psa 141:2)

iii. We should be like the Psalmist and seek the LORD all the time: *Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice.* (Psa 55:17)

2. (9-10) *The Sabbath offering.*

And on the Sabbath day two lambs in their first year, without blemish, and two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, with its drink offering; this is the burnt offering for every Sabbath, besides the regular burnt offering with its drink offering.

a. **And on the Sabbath day two lambs:** Every Sabbath day, an additional lamb was sacrificed every morning and every evening.

3. (11-15) *The monthly offering.*

At the beginnings of your months you shall present a burnt offering to the LORD: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, without blemish; three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, for each bull; two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, for the one ram; and one-tenth of an ephah of fine

flour, mixed with oil, as a grain offering for each lamb, as a burnt offering of sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD. Their drink offering shall be half a hin of wine for a bull, one-third of a hin for a ram, and one-fourth of a hin for a lamb; this *is* the burnt offering for each month throughout the months of the year. Also one kid of the goats as a sin offering to the LORD shall be offered, besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.

- a. **At the beginnings of your months you shall present a burnt offering to the LORD:** 1Sa 20:5 gives an example of how this offering might become part of a monthly feast for the leaders of the nation.
- b. **This is the burnt offering for each month throughout the months of the year:** "Later in Israel's history, the New Moon festivals may have become opportunities for excess, for licentious behavior. In the Prophets there are times when God says to his erring people, 'I hate your New Moons' (cf. Isa 1:14)."
i. Isa 1:14 shows how these festivals became corrupted: *Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.* We can come to the same place today, where God is tired of us going to church.

B. Offerings related to seasonal feasts.

1. **(16-25) Offerings at Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.**

On the fourteenth day of the first month *is the Passover of the LORD. And on the fifteenth day of this month is the feast; unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. And you shall present an offering made by fire as a burnt*

offering to the LORD: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year. Be sure they are without blemish. Their grain offering shall be of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah you shall offer for a bull, and two-tenths for a ram; you shall offer one-tenth of an ephah for each of the seven lambs; also one goat as a sin offering, to make atonement for you. You shall offer these besides the burnt offering of the morning, which is for a regular burnt offering. In this manner you shall offer the food of the offering made by fire daily for seven days, as a sweet aroma to the LORD; it shall be offered besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering. And on the seventh day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work.

a. **On the fourteenth day of the first month is the Passover of the LORD:** In addition to the lamb each household was to offer to God, the priests were also required to bring these offerings to God at the time of Passover on behalf of the entire nation.

2. (26-31) *Offerings at the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost).*

Also on the day of the firstfruits, when you bring a new grain offering to the LORD at your Feast of Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. You shall present a burnt offering as a sweet aroma to the LORD: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, with their grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for each bull, two-tenths for the one ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; also one kid of the goats, to make atonement for you. Be sure they are without blemish. You shall present them with their drink offerings, besides the regular burnt offering with its grain offering.

a. **One kid of the goats, to make atonement for you:** The primary meaning of the Feast of Pentecost was not atonement, but thanksgiving for the harvest. Yet every feast of Israel was to carry with it the idea of atonement. Just the same, our own life should be lived in constant awareness of the atonement made for us.

Offerings for the Feast of Trumpets

Num 29:1 On the first day of the seventh month you are to gather for worship, and no work is to be done. On that day trumpets are to be blown.

Num 29:2 Present a burnt offering to the LORD, an odor pleasing to him: one young bull, one ram, and seven one-year-old male lambs, all without any defects.

Num 29:3 Offer the proper grain offering of flour mixed with olive oil: 6 pounds of flour with the bull, 4 pounds with the ram,

Num 29:4 and 2 pounds with each lamb.

Num 29:5 Also offer one male goat as a sin offering, and in this way perform the ritual of purification for the people.

Num 29:6 Offer these in addition to the regular burnt offering for the first day of the month with its grain offering, and the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering. These food offerings are an odor pleasing to the LORD.

Offerings for the Day of Atonement

Num 29:7 Gather for worship on the tenth day of the seventh month; eat no food and do no work.

Num 29:8 Offer a burnt offering to the LORD, an odor pleasing to him: one young bull, one ram, and seven one-year-old male lambs, all without any defects.

Num 29:9 Offer the proper grain offering of flour mixed with olive oil: 6 pounds of flour with the bull, 4 pounds with the ram,

Num 29:10 and 2 pounds with each lamb.

Num 29:11 Also offer one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the goat offered in the ritual of purification for the people, and the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

Offerings for the Feast of Booths

Num 29:12 Gather for worship on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. Celebrate this festival in honor of the LORD for seven days and do no work.

Num 29:13 On this first day offer a food offering to the LORD, an odor pleasing to him: thirteen young bulls, two rams, and fourteen one-year-old male lambs, all without any defects.

Num 29:14 Offer the proper grain offering of flour mixed with olive oil: 6 pounds of flour with each bull, 4 pounds with each ram,

Num 29:15 and 2 pounds with each lamb, with the required wine offerings.

Num 29:16 Also offer one male goat as a sin offering. Offer these in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

Num 29:17 On the second day offer twelve young bulls, two rams, and fourteen one-year-old male lambs, all without any defects.

Num 29:18 (18-19) Offer with them all the other offerings required for the first day.

Num 29:20 On the third day offer eleven young bulls, two rams, and fourteen one-year-old male lambs, all without any defects.

Num 29:21 (21-22) Offer with them all the other offerings required for the first day.

Num 29:23 On the fourth day offer ten young bulls, two rams, and fourteen one-year-old male lambs, all without

any defects.

Num 29:24 (24-25) Offer with them all the other offerings required for the first day.

Num 29:26 On the fifth day offer nine young bulls, two rams, and fourteen one-year-old male lambs, all without any defects.

Num 29:27 (27-28) Offer with them all the other offerings required for the first day.

Num 29:29 On the sixth day offer eight young bulls, two rams, and fourteen one-year-old male lambs, all without any defects.

Num 29:30 (30-31) Offer with them all the other offerings required for the first day.

Num 29:32 On the seventh day offer seven young bulls, two rams, and fourteen one-year-old male lambs, all without any defects.

Num 29:33 (33-34) Offer with them all the other offerings required for the first day.

Num 29:35 On the eighth day gather for worship and do no work.

Num 29:36 Offer a burnt offering as a food offering to the LORD, an odor pleasing to him: one young bull, one ram, and seven one-year-old male lambs, all without any defects.

Num 29:37 (37-38) Offer with them all the other offerings required for the first day.

Num 29:39 These are the regulations concerning the burnt offerings, grain offerings, wine offerings, and fellowship offerings that you are to make to the LORD at your appointed festivals. These are in addition to the offerings you give in fulfillment of a vow or as freewill offerings.

Num 29:40 So Moses told the people of Israel everything that the LORD had commanded him.

Numbers 29:1-40

Numbers 29 - The Sacrificial System (Continued)

A. Offerings related to the seasonal feasts (continued from Numbers 28).

1. (1-6) Offerings at the Feast of Trumpets.

And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. For you it is a day of blowing the trumpets. You shall offer a burnt offering as a sweet aroma to the LORD: one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, without blemish. Their grain offering *shall be* fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, to make atonement for you; besides the burnt offering with its grain offering for the New Moon, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, as a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD.

2. (7-11) Offerings on the Day of Atonement.

On the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall afflict your souls; you shall not do any work. You shall present a burnt offering to the LORD as a sweet aroma: one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year. Be sure they are without blemish. Their grain offering *shall be of* fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the one ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, besides the sin offering for atonement, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings.

a. **You shall afflict your souls:** The Day of Atonement was not a happy feast. It was a day to carefully consider the burden of sin, and to put it away on a national basis through the appointed sacrifice for that day.

3. (12-39) *Offerings at the Feast of Tabernacles.*

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work, and you shall keep a feast to the LORD seven days. You shall present a burnt offering, an offering made by fire as a sweet aroma to the LORD: thirteen young bulls, two rams, and fourteen lambs in their first year. They shall be without blemish. Their grain offering shall be of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for each of the thirteen bulls, two-tenths for each of the two rams, and one-tenth for each of the fourteen lambs; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering. On the second day present twelve young bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs in their first year without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings. On the third day present eleven bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs in their first year without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; also one goat as a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering. On the fourth day present ten bulls, two rams, and fourteen lambs in their first year, without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink

offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering. On the fifth day *present* nine bulls, two rams, *and* fourteen lambs in their first year without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; also one goat as a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering. On the sixth day *present* eight bulls, two rams, *and* fourteen lambs in their first year without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; also one goat as a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering. On the seventh day *present* seven bulls, two rams, *and* fourteen lambs in their first year without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; also one goat as a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering. On the eighth day you shall have a sacred assembly. You shall do no customary work. You shall present a burnt offering, an offering made by fire as a sweet aroma to the LORD: one bull, one ram, seven lambs in their first year without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bull, for the ram, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; also one goat as a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering. These you shall present to the LORD at your appointed feasts

(besides your vowed offerings and your freewill offerings) as your burnt offerings and your grain offerings, as your drink offerings and your peace offerings.

- a. **Thirteen young bulls, two rams, and fourteen lambs:** This was the required offering on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Num 29:13). On the second day, **twelve young bulls, two rams, and fourteen lambs** (Num 29:17) were required, and so on, throughout the feast.
- b. **These you shall present to the LORD at your appointed feasts:** God required so many animals and such expensive sacrifice because the Feast of Tabernacles was a happy memorial of God's faithfulness to Israel during the Exodus. The sacrifice of so many animals was a demonstration of the richness of God's provision to them through the years in the wilderness.

B. The obedience of Israel.

1. *(40a) Moses tells the children of Israel the words of the LORD.*

So Moses told the children of Israel everything,

- a. **So Moses told the children of Israel everything:** Significantly, now as Israel was on the threshold of the Promised Land, they needed to be reminded of the essential place of sacrifice. Promised Land people know they need an atoning sacrifice and they remember it often.

2. *(40b) A costly obedience.*

Just as the LORD commanded Moses.

- a. **Just as the LORD commanded:** For Israel to obey what God commanded in Numbers 28, 29, it meant that every year, the priests sacrificed on 1,086 lambs, 113

bulls, 32 rams, more than a ton of flour, and some 1,000 bottles of oil and wine on behalf of the nation.

- i. The most prominent animal of sacrifice was the lamb. This is an obvious prophetic reference to Jesus, who is *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*. (Joh 1:29)
- b. **Just as the LORD commanded:** All this sacrifice did not include the sacrifices made by individuals or households. The priests and Levites were clearly busy with the job of sacrifice, and it was fulfilled at considerable expense.
 - i. In the days of Jesus, there is record of 255,600 Passover lambs being sacrificed at one Passover just by individuals and households.
 - ii. Significantly, *none of it was enough!* Not one of these hundreds of thousands of sacrifices over the centuries could ever take away a person's sin; that had to wait until a perfect sacrifice was offered - the sacrifice of Jesus.

Men and Vows

Num 30:1 Moses gave the following instructions to the leaders of the tribes of Israel.

Num 30:2 When a man makes a vow to give something to the LORD or takes an oath to abstain from something, he must not break his promise, but must do everything that he said he would.

Women and Vows

Num 30:3 When a young woman still living in her father's house makes a vow to give something to the LORD or promises to abstain from something,

Num 30:4 she must do everything that she vowed or promised unless her father raises an objection when he

hears about it.

Num 30:5 But if her father forbids her to fulfill the vow when he hears about it, she is not required to keep it. The LORD will forgive her, because her father refused to let her keep it.

Num 30:6 If an unmarried woman makes a vow, whether deliberately or carelessly, or promises to abstain from something, and then marries,

Num 30:7 she must do everything that she vowed or promised unless her husband raises an objection when he hears about it.

Num 30:8 But if her husband forbids her to fulfill the vow when he hears about it, she is not required to keep it. The LORD will forgive her.

Num 30:9 A widow or a divorced woman must keep every vow she makes and every promise to abstain from something.

Num 30:10 If a married woman makes a vow or promises to abstain from something,

Num 30:11 she must do everything that she vowed or promised unless her husband raises an objection when he hears about it.

Num 30:12 But if her husband forbids her to fulfill the vow when he hears about it, she is not required to keep it. The LORD will forgive her, because her husband prevented her from keeping her vow.

Num 30:13 Her husband has the right to affirm or to annul any vow or promise that she has made.

Num 30:14 But if, by the day after he hears of the vow, he has raised no objection, she must do everything that she has vowed or promised. He has affirmed the vow by not objecting on the day he heard of it.

Num 30:15 But if he later annuls the vow, he must suffer the consequences for the failure to fulfill the vow.

Num 30:16 These are the rules that the LORD gave Moses concerning vows made by an unmarried woman living in her father's house or by a married woman.

Numbers 30:1-16

Numbers 30 - The Keeping of Vows

A. The requirement to keep vows.

1. (1) Moses speaks to the leaders of the tribes.

Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, "This is the thing which the LORD has commanded:

a. **Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes:** This instruction was given to the leaders of the tribes of Israel, for them to communicate to all the others in Israel.

2. (2) The command of the LORD regarding vows.

If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."

a. **He shall not break his word:** A vow before God is no small thing. God expressly commanded that Israel should be careful to keep its vows, and to fulfill every oath made.

i. In many circles today, the breaking of an oath is just standard business practice - but before God, it is simply sin.

ii. Some people today believe that vows or oaths are not permitted for a Christian today. They think this because of what Jesus said in Mat 5:34-37 : *But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His*

footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one. (See also Jas 5:12)

iii. But, in context of the rest of Scripture, we see that Jesus was not forbidding oaths, as much as telling us that we should be so filled with integrity in our words that an oath is unnecessary.

iv. Jesus answered under oath in a court (Mat 26:63-64), and God Himself swears oaths (Luk 1:73, Act 2:30, Heb 3:18; Heb 6:13; Heb 6:17).

b. **He shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth:** Because God takes our vows so seriously, sometimes it is better not to make a vow.

i. *When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed. It is better not to vow than to vow and not pay.* (Ecc 5:4-5)

ii. Many vows are just plain foolish. "I'll never do that again" is a foolish vow, and it is foolish and unwise to demand such a vow from someone else.

iii. Of course, there is a vow we all can and should make - a vow to praise God: *Vows made to You are binding upon me, O God; I will render praises unto You.* (Psa 56:12) *So I will sing praise to Your name forever, that I may daily perform my vows.* (Psa 61:8)

B. Vows that are not binding.

1. (3-5) *A young woman under her father's household.*

"Or if a woman makes a vow to the LORD, and binds herself by some agreement while in her father's house in her youth, and her father hears her vow and the agreement by which she has bound herself, and her father holds his peace, then all her vows shall stand, and every agreement with which she has bound herself shall stand. But if her father overrules her on the day that he hears, then none of her vows nor her agreements by which she has bound herself shall stand; and the LORD will release her, because her father overruled her."

a. **And binds herself by some agreement while in her father's house in her youth:** An unmarried woman's vow was not taken as binding, unless approved of in some way by her "head" - her father, who had the right to overrule her.

2. (6-8) *A wife's vow overruled by her husband.*

"If indeed she takes a husband, while bound by her vows or by a rash utterance from her lips by which she bound herself, and her husband hears it, and makes no response to her on the day that he hears, then her vows shall stand, and her agreements by which she bound herself shall stand. But if her husband overrules her on the day that he hears it, he shall make void her vow which she took and what she uttered with her lips, by which she bound herself, and the LORD will release her."

a. **If her husband overrules her on the day that he hears it, he shall make void her vow which she took:** A married woman's vow was not taken as binding, unless ratified in some way by her husband, who had the right to overrule her.

3. (9) *A widow or a divorced woman is bound by her vows.*

Also any vow of a widow or a divorced woman, by which she has bound herself, shall stand against her.

a. **Any vow of a widow or a divorced woman:** A widow or divorced woman had no male “head” of her household (her “head” is God directly), so she is bound by her vows.

4. (10-16) *A wife’s vow confirmed by her husband.*

“If she vowed in her husband’s house, or bound herself by an agreement with an oath, and her husband heard it, and made no response to her and did not overrule her, then all her vows shall stand, and every agreement by which she bound herself shall stand. But if her husband truly made them void on the day he heard them, then whatever proceeded from her lips concerning her vows or concerning the agreement binding her, it shall not stand; her husband has made them void, and the LORD will release her. Every vow and every binding oath to afflict her soul, her husband may confirm it, or her husband may make it void. Now if her husband makes no response whatever to her from day to day, then he confirms all her vows or all the agreements that bind her; he confirms them, because he made no response to her on the day that he heard them. But if he does make them void after he has heard them, then he shall bear her guilt.” These are the statutes which the LORD commanded Moses, between a man and his wife, and between a father and his daughter in her youth in her father’s house.

a. **If she vowed in her husband’s house:** If the husband confirmed his wife’s vow (either specifically or by silence), then he was responsible to make sure the vow was fulfilled (**he shall bear her guilt, Num 30:15**).

- i. "*He shall bear her iniquity* means he will suffer for the broken vow as though it were his." (Wenham)
- b. **Every vow and every binding oath to afflict her soul, her husband may confirm it, or her husband may make it void:** This is an outworking of the principle of headship. When God declares someone to be in a position of rightful authority and others are expected to submit to that authority, the head also is accountable before God for the result.

- i. God never grants authority without accountability. When this is understood, it makes submission much easier.

Vengeance on Midian

Num 31:1 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 31:2 "Punish the Midianites for what they did to the people of Israel. After you have done that, you will die."

Num 31:3 So Moses said to the people, "Get ready for war, so that you can attack Midian and punish them for what they did to the LORD.

Num 31:4 From each tribe of Israel send a thousand men to war."

Num 31:5 So a thousand men were chosen from each tribe, a total of twelve thousand men ready for battle.

Num 31:6 Moses sent them to war under the command of Phinehas son of Eleazar the priest, who took charge of the sacred objects and the trumpets for giving signals.

Num 31:7 They attacked Midian, as the LORD had commanded Moses, and killed all the men,

Num 31:8 including the five kings of Midian: Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba. They also killed Balaam son of Beor.

Num 31:9 The people of Israel captured the Midianite women and children, took their cattle and their flocks, plundered all their wealth,

Num 31:10 and burned all their cities and camps.

Num 31:11 They took all the loot that they had captured, including the prisoners and the animals,

Num 31:12 and brought them to Moses and Eleazar and to the community of the people of Israel, who were at the camp on the plains of Moab across the Jordan from Jericho.

Num 31:13 Moses, Eleazar, and all the other leaders of the community went out of the camp to meet the army.

Num 31:14 Moses became angry with the officers, the commanders of battalions and companies, who had returned from the war.

Num 31:15 He asked them, "Why have you kept all the women alive?

Num 31:16 Remember that it was the women who followed Balaam's instructions and at Peor led the people to be unfaithful to the LORD. That was what brought the epidemic on the LORD's people.

Num 31:17 So now kill every boy and kill every woman who has had sexual intercourse,

Num 31:18 but keep alive for yourselves all the girls and all the women who are virgins.

Num 31:19 Now all of you who have killed anyone or have touched a corpse must stay outside the camp for seven days. On the third day and on the seventh day purify yourselves and the women you have captured.

Num 31:20 You must also purify every piece of clothing and everything made of leather, goats' hair, or wood."

Num 31:21 Eleazar the priest said to the men who had returned from battle, "These are the regulations that the LORD has given to Moses.

Num 31:22 (22-23) Everything that will not burn, such as gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, or lead, is to be purified by passing it through fire. Everything else is to be purified by the water for purification.

Num 31:24 On the seventh day you must wash your clothes; then you will be ritually clean and will be permitted to enter the camp."

Num 31:25 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 31:26 "You and Eleazar, together with the other leaders of the community, are to count everything that has been captured, including the prisoners and the animals.

Num 31:27 Divide what was taken into two equal parts, one part for the soldiers and the other part for the rest of the community.

Num 31:28 From the part that belongs to the soldiers, withhold as a tax for the LORD one out of every five hundred prisoners and the same proportion of the cattle, donkeys, sheep, and goats.

Num 31:29 Give them to Eleazar the priest as a special contribution to the LORD.

Num 31:30 From the part given to the rest of the people, take one out of every fifty prisoners and the same proportion of the cattle, donkeys, sheep, and goats. Give them to the Levites who are in charge of the LORD's Tent."

Num 31:31 Moses and Eleazar did what the LORD commanded.

Num 31:32 (32-35) The following is a list of what was captured by the soldiers, in addition to what they kept for themselves: 675,000 sheep and goats, 72,000 cattle, 61,000 donkeys, and 32,000 virgins.

Num 31:36 (36-40) The half share of the soldiers was 337,500 sheep and goats, of which 675 were the tax for the LORD; 36,000 cattle for the soldiers, of which 72 were the tax for the LORD; 30,500 donkeys for the soldiers, of which 61 were the tax for the LORD; and 16,000 virgins for the soldiers, of which 32 were the tax for the LORD.

Num 31:41 So Moses gave Eleazar the tax as a special contribution to the LORD, as the LORD had commanded.

Num 31:42 (42-46) The share of the community was the same as that for the soldiers: 337,500 sheep and goats, 36,000 cattle, 30,500 donkeys, and 16,000 virgins.

Num 31:47 From this share Moses took one out of every fifty prisoners and animals, and as the LORD had commanded, gave them to the Levites who were in charge of the LORD's Tent.

Num 31:48 Then the officers who had commanded the army went to Moses

Num 31:49 and reported, "Sir, we have counted the soldiers under our command and not one of them is missing.

Num 31:50 So we are bringing the gold ornaments, armlets, bracelets, rings, earrings, and necklaces that each of us has taken. We offer them to the LORD as a payment for our lives, so that he will protect us."

Num 31:51 Moses and Eleazar received the gold, all of which was in the form of ornaments.

Num 31:52 The total contribution of the officers weighed over four hundred pounds.

Num 31:53 Those who were not officers kept the loot they had taken.

Num 31:54 So Moses and Eleazar took the gold to the Tent, so that the LORD would protect the people of Israel.

Numbers 31:1-54

Numbers 31 - Vengeance on Midian

A. The command to destroy the Midianites and its fulfillment.

1. (1-2) God commands Israel to take vengeance on the Midianites.

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Take vengeance on the Midianites for the children of Israel.

Afterward you shall be gathered to your people."

a. **Take vengeance on the Midianites:** The Midianites were a nomadic people, at this time associated with the people of Moab. God commanded they be attacked in retribution for their seduction of Israel into sexual immorality and idolatry (Numbers 25).

i. "The Midianites were a large confederation of tribes, associated with various smaller groups... They roamed through the arid lands of the Sinai, the Negeb and Transjordan. Here it is those Midianites associated with Moab that are picked out for vengeance." (Wenham)

b. **Take vengeance:** We are generally uncomfortable with the idea of vengeance because it doesn't seem consistent with God's love. Yet, in the right context, vengeance is something good that God is interested in.

i. The Scriptures repeatedly speak of the vengeance of God as a positive thing. Evil comes when we take vengeance into our own hands.

ii. In this circumstance, Israel was in a unique place - with a special call to be an instrument of God's vengeance. This is something no person should take upon themselves today, knowing that ancient Israel had this unique place in God's plan.

iii. So, when God-ordained instruments of authority (such as government) take vengeance on evildoers, we as Christians can be at peace, knowing that good has been done when vengeance has been executed.

c. **Afterward you shall be gathered:** As it turned out, not immediately afterward, but afterward none the less.

2. (3-5) Moses organizes the army to battle Midian.

So Moses spoke to the people, saying, "Arm some of yourselves for war, and let them go against the Midianites to take vengeance for the LORD on Midian. A thousand from each tribe of all the tribes of Israel you shall send to the war." So there were recruited from the divisions of Israel one thousand from each tribe, twelve thousand armed for war.

3. (6-11) The battle fought, Midian defeated, and spoil taken.

Then Moses sent them to the war, one thousand from each tribe; he sent them to the war with Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, with the holy articles and the signal trumpets in his hand. And they warred against the Midianites, just as the LORD commanded Moses, and they killed all the males. They killed the kings of Midian with *the rest of those who were killed*; Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword. And the children of Israel took the women of Midian captive, with their little ones, and took as spoil all their cattle, all their flocks, and all their goods. They also burned with fire all the cities where they dwelt, and all their forts. And they took all the spoil and all the booty; of man and beast.

a. He sent them to war with Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, with the holy articles and the signal trumpets in his hand: Significantly, the priests went with the nation into this battle, and the priests went with **the holy articles**.

b. And they warred against the Midianites: According to the custom of the day, all the males were killed, and the women and children were taken as servants, with all the possessions being taken as spoil.

c. Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword: Balaam, who had masterminded the strategy by which Israel would be seduced into sexual immorality and idolatry, and who did it all for money, was now dead. He was judged by the vengeance of God, and his money did him no good.

- i. There is reason why Jud 1:11 speaks of *the error of Balaam for profit*; it is just plain *error* to sell out God for money - you end up a loser every time.
- ii. Balaam had longed, *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his! (Num 23:10)* But Balaam had no interest in living the life of the righteous, so he died the death of the sinner, in the company of sinners.

B. The division of the spoil.

1. (12-20) Moses is angry when Israel keeps the women of Midian following the attack against Midian.

Then they brought the captives, the booty, and the spoil to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the children of Israel, to the camp in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho. And Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the congregation, went to meet them outside the camp. But Moses was angry with the officers of the army, with the captains over thousands and captains over hundreds, who had come from the battle. And Moses said to them: "Have you kept all the women alive? Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD. Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man intimately. But keep alive for yourselves all the young

girls who have not known a man intimately. And as for you, remain outside the camp seven days; whoever has killed any person, and whoever has touched any slain, purify yourselves and your captives on the third day and on the seventh day. Purify every garment, everything made of leather, everything woven of goats' hair, and everything made of wood."

a. **Have you kept the women alive?** Moses was angry because the children of Israel failed to see the great danger of sexual immorality and idolatry posed by these women who before led the men of Israel into these exact sins.

i. Christians are often tripped up by things that were a threat, but they did not see them as a threat. Though most Israelites thought these women were safe, they were more dangerous to Israel than an army of mighty warriors. Israel could overcome mighty warriors if they were spiritually strong; but if they were seduced into immorality and idolatry, they would certainly fall.

ii. We often think of many things as dangerous to us as Christians - hostile government, secular humanism, academic attack, and so forth. But the things we accept in our midst as Christians that open the door to immorality and idolatry can do far more real damage than any of those other things.

b. **Keep alive for yourselves all the young girls who have not known a man intimately:** Therefore, all the women who had **known a man intimately** were to be killed. But ones who had not been connected with the immorality and idolatry of the Midianites could be kept alive.

c. **Every male among the little ones:** These also had to be killed. This was harsh but done with the understanding that in that ancient culture, the boys would have grown into men with the solemn responsibility to avenge their father's death and to perpetuate Midianite culture - which in itself was anti-God.

d. **Purify every garment, everything made of leather, everything woven of goats' hair, and everything made of wood:** As well, anything that had come into contact with the Midianites and the spoil taken from them had to be purified. Then it could be used.

i. This is a valid principle for us to observe when Christians want to "plunder" things from the world and use them for the cause of the gospel, such as music, media, and other things. But some things cannot be cleansed and must be done away with; other things can be cleansed and may be used by the people of God for the glory of God.

2. (21-24) *The purification of the spoil.*

Then Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone to the battle, "This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD commanded Moses: Only the gold, the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin, and the lead, everything that can endure fire, you shall put through the fire, and it shall be clean; and it shall be purified with the water of purification. But all that cannot endure fire you shall put through water. And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day and be clean, and afterward you may come into the camp."

a. **Everything that can endure fire, you shall put through the fire, and it shall be clean:** All the material spoil had to either be purified by fire or cleansed

with water. Only then was it fit for use by God among the people of God.

b. **Fire... and it shall be purified with the water of purification:** God uses the same means to purify believers today - the fire of trials and the water of washing.

i. When God uses the fire of purification, we can say with Job: *When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold* (Job 23:10). The fire purifies precious metal by causing the impurities (the dross) to rise to the top, where the refiner can skim them away. The refiner can tell when the gold is pure because he can then see his reflection in the pool of gold.

ii. When God wants to wash us clean, He not only uses the waters of baptism, but also the ministry of the Word as described in Eph 5:26 : *That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.*

3. (25-54) *The spoil is divided among the soldiers and the nation at large.*

Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Count up the plunder that was taken; of man and beast; you and Eleazar the priest and the chief fathers of the congregation; and divide the plunder into two parts, between those who took part in the war, who went out to battle, and all the congregation. And levy a tribute for the LORD on the men of war who went out to battle: one of every five hundred of the persons, the cattle, the donkeys, and the sheep; take it from their half, and give it to Eleazar the priest as a heave offering to the LORD. And from the children of Israel's half you shall take one of every fifty, drawn from the persons, the cattle, the donkeys, and the sheep, from all the livestock, and give them to the

Levites who keep charge of the tabernacle of the LORD." So Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the LORD commanded Moses. The booty remaining from the plunder, which the men of war had taken, was six hundred and seventy-five thousand sheep, seventy-two thousand cattle, sixty-one thousand donkeys, and thirty-two thousand persons in all, of women who had not known a man intimately. And the half, the portion for those who had gone out to war, was in number three hundred and thirty-seven thousand five hundred sheep; and the LORD's tribute of the sheep was six hundred and seventy-five. The cattle were thirty-six thousand, of which the LORD's tribute was seventy-two. The donkeys were thirty thousand five hundred, of which the LORD's tribute was sixty-one. The persons were sixteen thousand, of which the LORD's tribute was thirty-two persons. So Moses gave the tribute *which was* the LORD's heave offering to Eleazar the priest, as the LORD commanded Moses. And from the children of Israel's half, which Moses separated from the men who fought; now the half belonging to the congregation was three hundred and thirty-seven thousand five hundred sheep, thirty-six thousand cattle, thirty thousand five hundred donkeys, and sixteen thousand persons; and from the children of Israel's half Moses took one of every fifty, drawn from man and beast, and gave them to the Levites, who kept charge of the tabernacle of the LORD, as the LORD commanded Moses. Then the officers who were over thousands of the army, the captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, came near to Moses; and they said to Moses, "Your servants have taken a count of the men of war who are under our command, and not a man of us is missing. Therefore we have brought an offering for the LORD, what every man found of ornaments of

gold: armlets and bracelets and signet rings and earrings and necklaces, to make atonement for ourselves before the LORD.” So Moses and Eleazar the priest received the gold from them, all the fashioned ornaments. And all the gold of the offering that they offered to the LORD, from the captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, was sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty shekels. (The men of war had taken spoil, every man for himself.) And Moses and Eleazar the priest received the gold from the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it into the tabernacle of meeting as a memorial for the children of Israel before the LORD.

- a. **Divide the plunder into two parts, between those who took part in the war, who went out to battle, and all the congregation:** Customarily, the spoil belonged to the soldiers alone, but God did not want soldiers who were looters or pirates. So, He commanded that they also grant some of the spoil to the people of Israel who did not fight.
- b. **All the gold of the offering that they offered to the LORD:** A portion of the spoil also was to be given to the LORD. Even with the spoils of war, God wanted Israel to have the heart of givers.

Reuben and Gad Settle in Gilead

Num 32:1 The tribes of Reuben and Gad had a lot of livestock. When they saw how suitable the land of Jazer and Gilead was for cattle,

Num 32:2 they went to Moses, Eleazar, and the other leaders of the community and said,

Num 32:3 (3-4) "This region which the LORD has helped the Israelites occupy—the towns of Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sibmah, Nebo, and Beon—is good land for livestock, and we have so much livestock.

Num 32:5 Please give us this land as our property, and do not make us cross the Jordan River and settle there."

Num 32:6 Moses replied, "Do you want to stay here while the other Israelites go to war?

Num 32:7 How dare you try to discourage the people of Israel from crossing the Jordan into the land which the LORD has given them?

Num 32:8 That is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land.

Num 32:9 They went as far as Eshcol Valley and saw the land, but when they returned, they discouraged the people from entering the land which the LORD had given them.

Num 32:10 The LORD became angry that day and made a promise:

Num 32:11 'I swear that because they did not remain loyal to me, none of the men twenty years old or older who came out of Egypt will enter the land that I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.'

Num 32:12 This included everyone, except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun; they remained loyal to the LORD.

Num 32:13 The LORD became angry with the people and made them wander in the wilderness forty years until that whole generation that had displeased him was dead.

Num 32:14 And now you have taken your ancestors' place, a new generation of sinful people ready to bring down the fierce anger of the LORD on Israel again.

Num 32:15 If you people of Reuben and Gad refuse to follow him now, he will once again abandon all these people in the wilderness, and you will be responsible for their destruction."

Num 32:16 They approached Moses and said, "First, allow us to build stone enclosures here for our sheep and fortified towns for our dependents.

Num 32:17 Then we will be ready to go with the other Israelites into battle and lead the attack until we have settled them in the land that will be theirs. In the meantime, our dependents can live here in the fortified towns, safe from the people of this land.

Num 32:18 We will not return to our homes until all the other Israelites have taken possession of the land assigned to them.

Num 32:19 We will not take possession of any property among them on the other side of the Jordan, because we have received our share here east of the Jordan."

Num 32:20 Moses answered, "If you really mean what you say, then here in the presence of the LORD get ready to go into battle.

Num 32:21 All your fighting men are to cross the Jordan and under the command of the LORD they are to attack our enemies until the LORD defeats them

Num 32:22 and takes possession of the land. After that, you may return, because you will have fulfilled your obligation to the LORD and to the other Israelites. Then the LORD will acknowledge that this land east of the Jordan is yours.

Num 32:23 But if you do not keep your promise, I warn you that you will be sinning against the LORD. Make no mistake about it; you will be punished for your sin.

Num 32:24 So build your towns and the enclosures for your sheep, but do what you have promised!"

Num 32:25 The men of Gad and Reuben said, "Sir, we will do as you command.

Num 32:26 Our wives and children and our cattle and sheep will remain here in the towns of Gilead.

Num 32:27 But all of us are ready to go into battle under the LORD's command. We will cross the Jordan and fight, just as you have said."

Num 32:28 So Moses gave these commands to Eleazar, Joshua, and the other leaders of Israel:

Num 32:29 "If the men of Gad and Reuben cross the Jordan ready for battle at the LORD's command and if with their help you are able to conquer the land, then give them the land of Gilead as their property.

Num 32:30 But if they do not cross the Jordan and go into battle with you, they are to receive their share of the property in the land of Canaan, as you do."

Num 32:31 The men of Gad and Reuben answered, "Sir, we will do as the LORD has commanded.

Num 32:32 Under his command we will cross into the land of Canaan and go into battle, so that we can retain our property here east of the Jordan."

Num 32:33 So Moses assigned to the tribes of Gad and Reuben and to half the tribe of Manasseh all the territory of King Sihon of the Amorites and King Og of Bashan, including the towns and the country around them.

Num 32:34 The tribe of Gad rebuilt the fortified towns of Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer,

Num 32:35 Atroth Shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah,

Num 32:36 Beth Nimrah, and Beth Haran.

Num 32:37 The tribe of Reuben rebuilt Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim,

Num 32:38 Nebo, Baal Meon (this name was changed), and Sibmah. They gave new names to the towns they rebuilt.

Num 32:39 The clan of Machir son of Manasseh invaded the land of Gilead, occupied it, and drove out the Amorites who were there.

Num 32:40 So Moses gave Gilead to the clan of Machir, and they lived there.

Num 32:41 Jair, of the tribe of Manasseh, attacked and captured some villages and named them "Villages of Jair."

Num 32:42 Nobah attacked and captured Kenath and its villages, and he renamed it Nobah, after himself.

Numbers 32:1-42

Numbers 32 - The Tribes Settling East of the Jordan

A. The request of the tribes of Reuben and Gad.

1. (1-5) The request to settle on the east side of the Jordan River.

Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of livestock; and when they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, that indeed the region was a place for livestock, the children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spoke to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Shebam, Nebo, and Beon, the country which the LORD defeated before the congregation of Israel, is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock." Therefore they said, "If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as a possession. Do not take us over the Jordan."

a. **If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as a possession:** Israel had conquered the Moabites and the Midianites, and the ideal grazing lands on the east side of the Jordan River were laid out before them. The tribal leaders of Reuben and Gad were content with these lands and asked to be given them as their tribal inheritance.

b. **Do not take us over the Jordan:** For some 400 years, the tribes of Israel longed to go **over the Jordan** into the Promised Land. Now, it seemed, that

these two tribes were content to come *short* of crossing the Jordan and seem to be satisfied with settling for less.

i. "That any Israelite tribe should consider settling outside the land promised to Abraham showed a disturbing indifference to the divine word, the word on which Israel's existence entirely depended." (Wenham)

2. (6-7) *Moses reacts to the request of the tribes of Reuben and Gad.*

And Moses said to the children of Gad and to the children of Reuben: "Shall your brethren go to war while you sit here? Now why will you discourage the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the LORD has given them?

a. **Why will you discourage the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the LORD has given them?** Moses feared that the attitude of the tribes of Reuben and Gad would keep the other tribes from going into the Promised Land. Their attitude said, "We've fought enough and suffered enough already. Let's just settle down where we're at."

i. Moses' fear had a foundation. If you want to press on with the things of the LORD and go deeper and further with Him, there is a sure way to discourage that desire - start hanging around believers who are content with where they are, and who don't want to press on with the LORD. Complacency is contagious.

b. **Shall your brethren go to war while you sit here?** Moses wanted them to know that there was a battle to fight and that they were all in it together. Just because these tribes were content with where they were at did not relieve them of the responsibility to keep the battle going.

3. (8-15) Moses fears they are following in the footsteps of the previous generation of unbelief, the generation which perished in the wilderness.

"Thus your fathers did when I sent them away from Kadesh Barnea to see the land. For when they went up to the Valley of Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, so that they did not go into the land which the LORD had given them. So the LORD's anger was aroused on that day, and He swore an oath, saying, 'Surely none of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and above, shall see the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because they have not wholly followed Me, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite, and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have wholly followed the LORD.' So the LORD's anger was aroused against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the LORD was gone. And look! You have risen in your father's place, a brood of sinful men, to increase still more the fierce anger of the LORD against Israel. For if you turn away from following Him, He will once again leave them in the wilderness, and you will destroy all these people."

a. **They discouraged the heart of the children of Israel:** Moses reminded the leaders of the tribe of Reuben and Gad why Israel failed to enter the Promised Land some 38 years before.

i. It is a terrible thing to be used of the devil to discourage other believers to walking deeper and further with the LORD. We should ask God to guard us from ever discouraging the heart of another child of God.

b. **Because they have not wholly followed Me:** This is why the discouragement of the ten unfaithful spies work on the men of that generation. If they had wholly followed the LORD, the discouraging report would not have unduly influenced them.

i. What made Joshua and Caleb different was that they **wholly followed the LORD**. They did not bend to the discouraging report of the ten unfaithful spies.

ii. When we have not **wholly followed the LORD**, we are much more likely to be influenced by the carnal and the discouraging around us.

c. **If you turn away from following Him, He will once again leave them in the wilderness:** Perhaps this generation figured they had a free ticket to the Promised Land, no matter what, because the “dues” had already been paid by the generation of unbelief. No way! They can perish just like the previous generation if they walk in the same unbelief!

d. **You will destroy all these people:** It was as if Moses said, “Your discouragement of the nation would mean that *you* have destroyed them, just as the ten unfaithful spies destroyed the previous generation.”

i. Moses perhaps felt that the tribes of Reuben or Gad made a bad choice for themselves; that is, they hurt themselves by settling on the lands east of the Jordan River. But Moses did not confront them with that issue. If a child of God is content to settle for less in their Christian life, there is little or nothing one can do. But when their complacency begins to affect their brothers and sisters, it must be confronted. This was the basis of Moses’ confrontation.

B. The issue of the eastern tribes is settled.

1. (16-19) The tribal leaders of Reuben and Gad offer to send their troops to help conquer the land west of the Jordan River.

Then they came near to him and said: "We will build sheepfolds here for our livestock, and cities for our little ones, but we ourselves will be armed, ready to go before the children of Israel until we have brought them to their place; and our little ones will dwell in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land. We will not return to our homes until every one of the children of Israel has received his inheritance. For we will not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has fallen to us on this eastern side of the Jordan."

a. We ourselves will be armed, ready to go before the children of Israel until we have brought them to their place: This effectively answered the issue of discouragement. None of the tribes would envy Reuben or Gad, resting in ease, while the rest of them are battling for their lands. The men of Reuben and Gad would fight right beside them.

2. (20-24) Moses receives their offer - providing they fulfill it.

Then Moses said to them: "If you do this thing, if you arm yourselves before the LORD for the war, and all your armed men cross over the Jordan before the LORD until He has driven out His enemies from before Him, and the land is subdued before the LORD, then afterward you may return and be blameless before the LORD and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the LORD. But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out. Build cities for

your little ones and folds for your sheep, and do what has proceeded out of your mouth."

- a. **If you do this thing:** If they do as they said, then they would **be blameless before the LORD and before Israel**. But if they did not, they would surely be guilty.
- b. **But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out:** And if they failed to do as they said, they could **be sure that your sin will find you out**. While it is true that any sin may find us out, the sin specifically spoken of here is the sin of *doing nothing!*
 - i. If the tribes of Reuben and Gad did nothing - if they stayed at home while their brothers were battling for life and death to take possession of the Promised Land – then their sin of doing nothing would surely find them out.
 - ii. Sometimes, doing nothing is a great sin - and it is a sin that will certainly become evident, and will find us out.

3. (25-27) *The tribal leaders of Reuben and Gad agree.*

And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben spoke to Moses, saying: "Your servants will do as my lord commands. Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our livestock will be there in the cities of Gilead; but your servants will cross over, every man armed for war, before the LORD to battle, just as my lord says."

4. (28-42) *The agreement is settled, and cities are given to the tribes settling on the lands east of the Jordan River.*

So Moses gave command concerning them to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the chief fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel. And

Moses said to them: "If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben cross over the Jordan with you, every man armed for battle before the LORD, and the land is subdued before you, then you shall give them the land of Gilead as a possession. But if they do not cross over armed with you, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan." Then the children of Gad and the children of Reuben answered, saying: "As the LORD has said to your servants, so we will do. We will cross over armed before the LORD into the land of Canaan, but the possession of our inheritance *shall remain* with us on this side of the Jordan." So Moses gave to the children of Gad, to the children of Reuben, and to half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land with its cities within the borders, the cities of the surrounding country. And the children of Gad built Dibon and Ataroth and Aroer, Atroth and Shophan and Jazer and Jogbehah, Beth Nimrah and Beth Haran, fortified cities, and folds for sheep. And the children of Reuben built Heshbon and Elealeh and Kirjathaim, Nebo and Baal Meon (*their names being changed*) and Shibmah; and they gave *other names* to the cities which they built. And the children of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead and took it, and dispossessed the Amorites who were in it. So Moses gave Gilead to Machir the son of Manasseh, and he dwelt in it. Also Jair the son of Manasseh went and took its small towns, and called them Havoth Jair. Then Nobah went and took Kenath and its villages, and he called it Nobah, after his own name.

- a. So Moses gave to the children of Gad, to the children of Reuben, and to half the tribe of

Manasseh the son of Joseph: Num 32:33 introduces another tribe - actually, half the tribe of Manasseh – who were likewise content to settle on the lands east of the Jordan River. So, in total, two and one-half tribes never took possession of land west of the Jordan River.

Recounting Israel's Journey

Num 33:1 The following account gives the names of the places where the Israelites set up camp after they left Egypt in their tribes under the leadership of Moses and Aaron.

Num 33:2 At the command of the LORD, Moses wrote down the name of the place each time they set up camp.

Num 33:3 The people of Israel left Egypt on the fifteenth day of the first month of the year, the day after the first Passover. Under the LORD's protection they left the city of Rameses in full view of the Egyptians,

Num 33:4 who were burying the first-born sons that the LORD had killed. By doing this, the LORD showed that he was more powerful than the gods of Egypt.

Num 33:5 The people of Israel left Rameses and set up camp at Sukkoth.

Num 33:6 Their next camp was at Etham on the edge of the desert.

Num 33:7 From there they turned back to Pi Hahiroth, east of Baal Zephon, and camped near Migdol.

Num 33:8 They left Pi Hahiroth and passed through the Red Sea into the desert of Shur; after a three days' march they camped at Marah.

Num 33:9 From there they went to Elim, where they camped, because there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees there.

Num 33:10 They left Elim and camped near the Gulf of Suez.

Num 33:11 Their next camp was in the desert of Sin.

Num 33:12 Then they camped at Dophkah,

Num 33:13 and after that at Alush.

Num 33:14 Next was Rephidim, where there was no water for them to drink.

Num 33:15 (15-37) From Rephidim to Mount Hor they set up camp at the following places: the Sinai Desert, Kibroth Hattaavah (or "Graves of Craving"), Hazeroth, Rithmah, Rimmon Perez, Libnah, Rissah, Kehelathah, Mount Sheper, Haradah, Makheloth, Tahath, Terah, Mithkah, Hashmonah, Moseroth, Bene Jaakan, Hor Haggidgad, Jotbathah, Abronah, Eziongeber, the wilderness of Zin (that is, Kadesh), and Mount Hor, at the edge of the land of Edom.

Num 33:38 (38-39) At the command of the LORD, Aaron the priest climbed Mount Hor. At the age of 123 he died there on the first day of the fifth month of the fortieth year after the Israelites had left Egypt.

Num 33:40 The king of Arad in southern Canaan heard that the Israelites were coming.

Num 33:41 (41-49) From Mount Hor to the plains of Moab the Israelites set up camp at the following places: Zalmonah, Punon, Oboth, the ruins of Abarim in the territory of Moab, Dibon Gad, Almon Diblathaim, the Abarim Mountains near Mount Nebo, and in the plains of Moab across the Jordan River from Jericho, between Beth Jeshimoth and Acacia Valley.

Drive Out the Inhabitants

Num 33:50 There in the plains of Moab across the Jordan from Jericho the LORD gave Moses

Num 33:51 the following instructions for Israel: "When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan,

Num 33:52 you must drive out all the inhabitants of the land. Destroy all their stone and metal idols and all their places of worship.

Num 33:53 Occupy the land and settle in it, because I am giving it to you.

Num 33:54 Divide the land among the various tribes and clans by drawing lots, giving a large piece of property to a large clan and a small one to a small clan.

Num 33:55 But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those that are left will be as troublesome as splinters in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they will fight against you.

Num 33:56 If you do not drive them out, I will destroy you, as I planned to destroy them."

Numbers 33:1-56

Numbers 33 - Review of the Exodus, Preview of the Conquest

A. Looking back: What God had already done.

1. (1-2) The account of Israel's journey, written by the command of the LORD.

These are the journeys of the children of Israel, who went out of the land of Egypt by their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron. Now Moses wrote down the starting points of their journeys at the command of the LORD. And these are their journeys according to their starting points:

2. (3-4) The departure from Egypt.

They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians. For the Egyptians were burying all *their* firstborn, whom the LORD had killed among them. Also on their gods the LORD had executed judgments.

- a. **The children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians:** Though they were slaves, they did not have to shrink out of Egypt; God gave them the boldness to leave as conquerors, not as escaping slaves.
- b. **On their gods the LORD had executed judgments:** The plagues the LORD brought upon Egypt were not randomly chosen; they were specifically intended to humble the people and rebuke their belief in the bizarre and demonic Egyptian deities.

3. (5-15) *From Egypt to Mount Sinai.*

Then the children of Israel moved from Rameses and camped at Succoth. They departed from Succoth and camped at Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness. They moved from Etham and turned back to Pi Hahiroth, which is east of Baal Zephon; and they camped near Migdol. They departed from before Hahiroth and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, went three days' journey in the Wilderness of Etham, and camped at Marah. They moved from Marah and came to Elim. At Elim were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; so they camped there. They moved from Elim and camped by the Red Sea. They moved from the Red Sea and camped in the Wilderness of Sin. They journeyed from the Wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah. They departed from Dophkah and camped at Alush. They moved from Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for the people to drink. They departed from Rephidim and camped in the Wilderness of Sinai.

- a. **Then the children of Israel moved from Rameses... and camped in the Wilderness of Sinai:** This portion of the journey took them more than a year,

but most of the time was not spent traveling, but in receiving the law at Mount Sinai.

4. (16-49) *From Mount Sinai to the shores of the Jordan River.*

They moved from the Wilderness of Sinai and camped at Kibroth Hattaavah. They departed from Kibroth Hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth. They departed from Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah. They departed from Rithmah and camped at Rimmon Perez. They departed from Rimmon Perez and camped at Libnah. They moved from Libnah and camped at Rissah. They journeyed from Rissah and camped at Kehelathah. They went from Kehelathah and camped at Mount Sheper. They moved from Mount Sheper and camped at Haradah. They moved from Haradah and camped at Makheloth. They moved from Makheloth and camped at Tahath. They departed from Tahath and camped at Terah. They moved from Terah and camped at Mithkah. They went from Mithkah and camped at Hashmonah. They departed from Hashmonah and camped at Moseroth. They departed from Moseroth and camped at Bene Jaakan. They moved from Bene Jaakan and camped at Hor Hagidgad. They went from Hor Hagidgad and camped at Jotbathah. They moved from Jotbathah and camped at Abronah. They departed from Abronah and camped at Ezion Geber. They moved from Ezion Geber and camped in the Wilderness of Zin, which is Kadesh. They moved from Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, on the boundary of the land of Edom. Then Aaron the priest went up to Mount Hor at the command of the LORD, and died there in the fortieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, on the first day of the fifth month. Aaron was one hundred and twenty-three years old when he died on

Mount Hor. Now the king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the South in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the children of Israel. So they departed from Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah. They departed from Zalmonah and camped at Punon. They departed from Punon and camped at Oboth. They departed from Oboth and camped at Ije Abarim, at the border of Moab. They departed from Ijim and camped at Dibon Gad. They moved from Dibon Gad and camped at Almon Diblathaim. They moved from Almon Diblathaim and camped in the mountains of Abarim, before Nebo. They departed from the mountains of Abarim and camped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, *across from* Jericho. They camped by the Jordan, from Beth Jesimoth as far as the Abel Acacia Grove in the plains of Moab.

a. **They moved from the Wilderness of Sinai:** This portion of the journey took them some 38 years; not because the distance was so long, but because God led them in wanderings because the generation of unbelief had to die in the wilderness before a generation of faith could be raised up to take possession of the Promised Land.

b. **Kibroth Hattaavah... Hazereth... Rithmah:** The listing of Israel's encampments comes rapidly; more than 30 place-names are given in quick succession. During this time, there was a lot of activity for the people of Israel - but no progress. They weren't coming any closer to the Promised Land and would not come closer until the generation of unbelief had passed away.

B. Looking ahead: The conquest of Canaan.

1. (50-53) *The command to conquer the inhabitants of Canaan.*

Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places; you shall dispossess the *inhabitants* of the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess.'"

a. **You shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you:** God had a unique role for the nation of Israel in regard to the people of Canaan. He used them as an unique instrument of judgment against the Canaanites.

b. **Drive out all the inhabitants of the land, and to destroy all their engraved stones... their molded images... their high places:** This unique purpose explains why Israel was commanded not only to defeat them militarily, but to erase the remains of the idolatrous culture. Modern archaeology has documented the corrupt and demonic worship practices of the Canaanites. They were truly a culture ripe for the judgment of God.

2. (54-56) *The command to possess the land of Canaan.*

And you shall divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families; to the larger you shall give a larger inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give a smaller inheritance; there everyone's *inheritance* shall be whatever falls to him by lot. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers. But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you

dwell. Moreover it shall be *that I will do to you as I thought to do to them.*

- a. **You shall divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families:** God's intent was not only to bring judgment on the corrupt culture of the Canaanites, but also to give the land to Israel to possess.
- b. **If you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides:** If Israel failed to drive the Canaanites out of the land, they could still occupy the Promised Land - but the corrupt practices and heart of the Canaanites would find a place among Israel, and Israel itself would eventually be driven out of the land (**it shall be that I will do to you as I thought to do to them**).
 - i. This became true of Israel's history. They did not fully drive out the Canaanites, and though they possessed the land, the corruption of the Canaanites continued among Israel until eventually God allowed Israel to be driven out of the land in exile.
 - ii. It is of no use for the church to succeed in the eyes of man - as Israel had succeeded when they occupied the land and became a legitimate nation, instead of an enslaved people - if it merely allows the corrupt practices and attitudes of the world to take root. If this happens, the church should expect to be eventually driven from its place of success.

Boundaries of the Land

Num 34:1 The LORD gave Moses

Num 34:2 the following instructions for the people of Israel: "When you enter Canaan, the land which I am giving you, the borders of your territory will be as follows.

Num 34:3 The southern border will extend from the wilderness of Zin along the border of Edom. It will begin on the east at the southern end of the Dead Sea.

Num 34:4 Then it will turn southward toward Akrabbim Pass and continue on through Zin as far south as Kadesh Barnea. Then it will turn northwest to Hazar Addar and on to Azmon,

Num 34:5 where it will turn toward the valley at the border of Egypt and end at the Mediterranean.

Num 34:6 "The western border will be the Mediterranean Sea.

Num 34:7 "The northern border will follow a line from the Mediterranean to Mount Hor

Num 34:8 and from there to Hamath Pass. It will continue to Zedad

Num 34:9 and to Ziphron, and will end at Hazar Enan.

Num 34:10 "The eastern border will follow a line from Hazar Enan to Shepham.

Num 34:11 It will then go south to Harbel, east of Ain, and on to the hills on the eastern shore of Lake Galilee,

Num 34:12 then south along the Jordan River to the Dead Sea. "These will be the four borders of your land."

Num 34:13 So Moses said to the Israelites, "This is the land that you will receive by drawing lots, the land that the LORD has assigned to the nine and one-half tribes.

Num 34:14 The tribes of Reuben and Gad and the eastern half of Manasseh have received their property, divided according to their families,

Num 34:15 on the eastern side of the Jordan, opposite Jericho."

List of Tribal Chiefs

Num 34:16 The LORD said to Moses,

Num 34:17 "Eleazar the priest and Joshua son of Nun will divide the land for the people.

Num 34:18 Take also one leader from each tribe to help them divide it."

Num 34:19 (19-28) These are the men the LORD chose:

Tribe	Leader
Judah	Caleb son of Jephunneh
Simeon	Shelumiel son of Ammihud
Benjamin	Elidad son of Chislon
Dan	Bukki son of Jogli
Manasseh	Hanniel son of Ephod
Ephraim	Kemuel son of Shiptan
Zebulun	Elizaphan son of Parnach
Issachar	Paltiel son of Azzan
Asher	Ahihud son of Shelomi
Naphtali	Pedahel son of Ammihud

Num 34:29 These are the men that the LORD assigned to divide the property for the people of Israel in the land of Canaan.

Numbers 34:1-29

Numbers 34 - The Boundaries of the Land, Men Chosen to Portion the Land

A. The boundaries of the Promised Land.

1. (1-2) Introduction.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Command the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land of Canaan, this is the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance; the land of Canaan to its boundaries."

a. **This is the land that shall fall to you:** God was about to describe the borders of the Promised Land to Moses and the children of Israel. Though the lands on the eastern side of the Jordan River belonged to Israel (and two and one-half tribes settled on the eastern lands), those lands were not considered to be the "Promised Land" - that is, Canaan.

b. **As an inheritance:** Israel was going to have to take control of the Promised Land by conquest; they would have to drive out the Canaanites to take possession. Yet, they should never consider that the land was given to them because they *earned* it. It was given to them by God as an inheritance. Inheritances are freely given, not earned.

2. (3-5) *The southern border of the Promised Land.*

Your southern border shall be from the Wilderness of Zin along the border of Edom; then your southern border shall extend eastward to the end of the Salt Sea; your border shall turn from the southern side of the Ascent of Akrabbim, continue to Zin, and be on the south of Kadesh Barnea; then it shall go on to Hazar Addar, and continue to Azmon; the border shall turn from Azmon to the Brook of Egypt, and it shall end at the Sea.

a. **To the Brook of Egypt:** There is some debate about the identity of **the Brook of Egypt**; is it the Nile river, or a smaller stream towards the south? This would determine whether or not God gave the greater Sinai region to Israel as part of the Promised Land.

3. (6) *The western border of the Promised Land: The Mediterranean Sea.*

As for the western border, you shall have the Great Sea for a border; this shall be your western border.

4. (7-9) *The northern border of the Promised Land.*

And this shall be your northern border: From the Great Sea you shall mark out your *border* line to Mount Hor; from Mount Hor you shall mark out your *border* to the entrance of Hamath; then the direction of the border shall be toward Zedad; the border shall proceed to Ziphron, and it shall end at Hazar Enan. This shall be your northern border.

5. (10-12) *The eastern border of the Promised Land.*

You shall mark out your eastern border from Hazar Enan to Shepham; the border shall go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain; the border shall go down and reach to the eastern side of the Sea of Chinnereth; the border shall go down along the Jordan, and it shall end at the Salt Sea. This shall be your land with its surrounding boundaries.

6. (13-15) *This is the land the nine and one-half tribes settling on the western side of the Jordan River would divide.*

Then Moses commanded the children of Israel, saying: "This is the land which you shall inherit by lot, which the LORD has commanded to give to the nine tribes and to the half-tribe. For the tribe of the children of Reuben according to the house of their fathers, and the tribe of the children of Gad according to the house of their fathers, have received *their inheritance*; and the half-tribe of Manasseh has received its inheritance. The two tribes and the half-tribe have received their inheritance on this side of

the Jordan, across from Jericho eastward, toward the sunrise."

B. Leaders appointed to divide the land.

1. (16-17) Joshua and Eleazar appointed to divide the land.

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "These are the names of the men who shall divide the land among you as an inheritance: Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun."

a. Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun:

The division of the land was, in fact, a potentially divisive - even explosive - issue among the people of Israel. It was right to take the two most godly and prominent leaders of the nation to direct this essential and controversial duty.

2. (18-29) Leaders from each of the twelve tribes are appointed to help Joshua and Eleazar divide the land.

"And you shall take one leader of every tribe to divide the land for the inheritance. These are the names of the men: from the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; from the tribe of the children of Simeon, Shemuel the son of Ammihud; from the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad the son of Chislon; a leader from the tribe of the children of Dan, Bukki the son of Jogli; from the sons of Joseph: a leader from the tribe of the children of Manasseh, Hanniel the son of Ephod, and a leader from the tribe of the children of Ephraim, Kemuel the son of Shiphtan; a leader from the tribe of the children of Zebulun, Elizaphan the son of Parnach; a leader from the tribe of the children of Issachar, Paltiel the son of Azzan; a leader from the tribe of the children of Asher, Ahihud the son of Shelomi; and a leader from the tribe of the children of Naphtali, Pedahel the son of Ammihud." These are the ones the

LORD commanded to divide the inheritance among the children of Israel in the land of Canaan.

Cities for the Levites

Num 35:1 In the plains of Moab across the Jordan from Jericho the LORD said to Moses,

Num 35:2 "Tell the Israelites that from the property they receive they must give the Levites some cities to live in and pasture land around the cities.

Num 35:3 These cities will belong to the Levites, and they will live there. The pasture land will be for their cattle and all their other animals.

Num 35:4 The pasture land is to extend outward from the city walls five hundred yards in each direction,

Num 35:5 so that there is a square area measuring one thousand yards on each side, with the city in the middle.

Num 35:6 You are to give the Levites six cities of refuge to which any of you can escape if you kill someone accidentally. In addition, give them forty-two other cities

Num 35:7 with their pasture land, making a total of forty-eight.

Num 35:8 The number of Levite cities in each tribe is to be determined according to the size of its territory."

Cities of Refuge

Num 35:9 The LORD told Moses

Num 35:10 to say to the people of Israel: "When you cross the Jordan River and enter the land of Canaan,

Num 35:11 you are to choose cities of refuge to which any of you can escape if you kill someone accidentally.

Num 35:12 There you will be safe from the dead person's relative who seeks revenge. No one accused of manslaughter is to be put to death without a public trial.

Num 35:13 Choose six cities,

Num 35:14 three east of the Jordan and three in the land of Canaan.

Num 35:15 These will serve as cities of refuge for Israelites and for foreigners who are temporary or permanent residents. Anyone who kills someone accidentally can escape to one of them.

Num 35:16 (16-18) "If, however, any of you use a weapon of iron or stone or wood to kill someone, you are guilty of murder and are to be put to death.

Num 35:19 The dead person's nearest relative has the responsibility for putting the murderer to death. When he finds you, he is to kill you.

Num 35:20 "If you hate someone and kill him by pushing him down or by throwing something at him

Num 35:21 or by striking him with your fist, you are guilty of murder and are to be put to death. The dead person's nearest relative has the responsibility for putting the murderer to death. When he finds you, he is to kill you.

Num 35:22 "But suppose you accidentally kill someone you do not hate, whether by pushing him down or by throwing something at him.

Num 35:23 Or suppose that, without looking, you throw a stone that kills someone whom you did not intend to hurt and who was not your enemy.

Num 35:24 In such cases the community shall judge in your favor and not in favor of the dead person's relative who is seeking revenge.

Num 35:25 You are guilty only of manslaughter, and the community is to rescue you from the dead person's relative, and they are to return you to the city of refuge to which you had escaped. You must live there until the death of the man who is then High Priest.

Num 35:26 If you leave the city of refuge to which you have escaped

Num 35:27 and if the dead person's relative finds you and kills you, this act of revenge is not murder.

Num 35:28 Any of you guilty of manslaughter must remain in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest, but after that you may return home.

Num 35:29 These rules apply to you and your descendants wherever you may live.

Num 35:30 "Those accused of murder may be found guilty and put to death only on the evidence of two or more witnesses; the evidence of one witness is not sufficient to support an accusation of murder.

Num 35:31 Murderers must be put to death. They cannot escape this penalty by the payment of money.

Num 35:32 If they have fled to a city of refuge, do not allow them to make a payment in order to return home before the death of the High Priest.

Num 35:33 If you did this, you would defile the land where you are living. Murder defiles the land, and except by the death of the murderer there is no way to perform the ritual of purification for the land where someone has been murdered.

Num 35:34 Do not defile the land where you are living, because I am the LORD and I live among the people of Israel."

Numbers 35:1-34

Numbers 35 - Levitical Cities, Cities of Refuge

A. Appointment of the Levitical cities.

1. (1-3) The command to provide cities and command-lands for the Levites.

And the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho, saying: "Command the children of Israel that they give the Levites cities

to dwell in from the inheritance of their possession, and you shall also give the Levites common-land around the cities. They shall have the cities to dwell in; and their common-land shall be for their cattle, for their herds, and for all their animals.”

a. **Command the children of Israel that they give the Levites cities to dwell in:** The tribe of Levi had no “state” or “province” within Israel. Their inheritance was to be the LORD alone: *Then the LORD said to Aaron: You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel.* (Num 18:20)

b. **They shall have cities to dwell in:** Yet, the Levites had to live somewhere. God commanded that each tribe give cities to the Levites, so that the Levites would be sprinkled throughout the whole nation.

c. **And their common-land shall:** The Levites were to be given more than just the cities; around each city, they were to be given **common-land** - land suitable for the grazing of their animals and for small-scale farming.

2. (4-5) *Measuring the common-land around each city.*

The common-land of the cities which you shall give the Levites shall extend from the wall of the city outward a thousand cubits all around. And you shall measure outside the city on the east side two thousand cubits, on the south side two thousand cubits, on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits. The city shall be in the middle. This shall belong to them as common-land for the cities.

3. (6-8) *The number of Levitical cities and their distribution.*

Now among the cities which you will give to the Levites you shall appoint six cities of refuge, to which a manslayer may flee. And to these you shall add forty-two cities. So all the cities you will give to the Levites shall be forty-eight; these you shall give with their common-land. And the cities which you will give shall be from the possession of the children of Israel; from the larger tribe you shall give many, from the smaller you shall give few. Each shall give some of its cities to the Levites, in proportion to the inheritance that each receives.

- a. **Among the cities of which you will give to the Levites:** There were to be a total of 48 Levitical cities; six cities of refuge, and 42 additional cities.
- b. **From the larger tribe you shall give many, from the smaller you shall give few:** The cities were to be distributed proportionally through the nation, so that where there were larger populations and larger areas of land, there would be more Levitical cities, so that no one in Israel would be far from a city of refuge.
- c. **In proportion to the inheritance that each receives:** This reflects God's desire to evenly distribute the Levites - who were to be the most spiritually focused Israelites - the full-time ministers, so to speak - evenly throughout Israel, so their influence could be distributed throughout the whole nation.
 - i. This shows the wisdom of God in not making a Levitical state that others would have to go to. God intended that these ministers go out among the people, to influence them for the LORD.
 - ii. In the same way, God does not intend that there be a Christian country or state where all the Christians live together in spiritual bliss, and simply say to the world, "come and join us if you want."

Instead, God wants Christians to be sprinkled throughout the whole world, influencing people for Jesus Christ.

B. Cities of refuge.

1. (9-12) *The purpose of the cities of refuge.*

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there. They shall be cities of refuge for you from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation in judgment.'"

- a. **That the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there:** In the ancient culture of Israel, it was not left entirely up to the government to avenge a murder. Each extended family had a recognized **avenger** who would ensure that one who murdered a family member would likewise be killed.
 - i. This practice was based upon a correct understanding of Gen 9:6 : *Whoever shed's man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God, God made man.*
- b. **Who kills any person accidentally:** This, if properly understood and applied, could be an effective deterrent to murder and not a bad institution. Yet, the system had a fatal weakness: What if a death was accidental, yet difficult to prove that it was accidental?
 - i. We can picture the situation easily: Two men work together, chopping down trees, when one man swings an ax and the ax head flies off, striking the other man in the head and instantly killing him. The surviving man had good reason to believe the avenger of blood

from the dead man's family would track him down and kill him, believing the death was murder.

ii. Therefore, such a man could flee to a city of refuge - an appointed Levitical city, where he could stay, safe from the avenger of blood, until the issue was settled, and he could leave the city of refuge safely.

2. (13-14) The placement of the cities of refuge.

And of the cities which you give, you shall have six cities of refuge. You shall appoint three cities on this side of the Jordan, and three cities you shall appoint in the land of Canaan, which will be cities of refuge.

a. **You shall have six cities of refuge:** There were to be six cities of refuge, with three on each side of the Jordan River. Each of the three cities on either side would be positioned as north, central, and south.

i. Jos 20:7-8 records the actual choice of the cities. They fulfilled the plan of being evenly distributed perfectly. Deu 19:3 also tells us that proper roads were to be built and maintained to these cities of refuge. A city of refuge was no good to the slayer if they could not get there quickly.

b. **Which will be cities of refuge:** This meant that the cities were close to all; no one was very far from a city of refuge. This was obviously important when the avenger of blood chased you.

3. (15) The people eligible for protection in the cities of refuge.

These six cities shall be for refuge for the children of Israel, for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them, that anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there.

a. **That anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there:** Anyone - a stranger or a citizen of Israel - anyone who needed to find protection in the cities of refuge could. Their protection was not limited to the children of Israel.

4. (16-21) *How to judge if a death was truly murder.*

But if he strikes him with an iron implement, so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. And if he strikes him with a stone in the hand, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. Or if he strikes him with a wooden hand weapon, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death. If he pushes him out of hatred or, while lying in wait, hurls something at him so that he dies, or in enmity he strikes him with his hand so that he dies, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death. He is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.

a. **He is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death:** Significantly, the Bible makes the clear distinction between *killing* and **murder**. All murder is killing; but not all killing is murder. Society needs laws to establish the principles that decide a death to be either an unfortunate killing or true murder.

b. **If he strikes him with an iron implement:** Murder could be judged depending on the weapon used; if it was an **iron implement** (likely to kill), or if it were a **stone** or a **wooden hand weapon, by which one could die**, then the killer could be found guilty of murder.

c. If he pushes him out of hatred or, while lying in wait, hurls something at him so that he dies:

Murder could also be judged by discerning the state of heart and presence of premeditation in the killer. If the killing happens **while lying in wait** or if the killer strikes **in enmity**, murder can be judged.

5. (22-24) How to judge if a death was truly manslaughter.

However, if he pushes him suddenly without enmity, or throws anything at him without lying in wait, or uses a stone, by which a man could die, throwing it at him without seeing him, so that he dies, while he was not his enemy or seeking his harm, then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood according to these judgments.

a. If he pushes him suddenly without enmity: If there was the absence of murderous intent, or the absence of premeditation, or if the death was clearly accidental, then the man was not guilty of murder and could not be turned over to the avenger of blood.

b. So the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood according to these judgments: Both sides of the story had to be taken into account. Judgment was not to be made on the basis merely any one side's story.

6. (25-28) If the killer is determined to be innocent of murder.

So the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall return him to the city of refuge where he had fled, and he shall remain there until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil. But if the manslayer at any time goes outside the limits of the city of refuge where he fled, and the

avenger of blood finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood, because he should have remained in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest. But after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession.

a. **So the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood:** Having been judged innocent of murder, the manslayer could live in peace and safety - but only within the walls of the city of refuge.

i. Significantly, someone who killed another - but was innocent of murder - still had their life profoundly affected. They had to move from their city, and presumably their family as well, and had to live the rest of their lives in that city of refuge. The tragedy also affected their life.

b. **He shall remain there until the death of the high priest:** The only thing that could set the man free from the city of refuge was the death of the high priest; at the death of the high priest, the avenger of blood no longer had any rights over the man in the city of refuge.

c. **But if the manslayer at any time goes outside the limits of the city of refuge where he fled:** Until the time of the high priest's death, if the man who sought protection in the city of refuge wandered outside the walls of the city, he was fair game for the avenger of blood - only within his place of refuge was he safe.

7. *The cities of refuge as a picture of Jesus.*

a. The Bible applies this picture of the city of refuge to the believer finding refuge in God on more than one occasion:

- i. Psa 46:1, says *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.* More than 15 other times, the Psalms speak of God as being our refuge.
- ii. Heb 6:18 says, *That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.* We can flee to Jesus for refuge!

- b. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are *within easy reach* of the needy person; they were of no use unless someone could get to the place of refuge.
- c. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are *open to all*, not just the Israelite; no one needs to fear that they would be turned away from their place of refuge in their time of need.
- d. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge became a place where the one in need would *live*; you didn't come to a city of refuge in time of need just to look around.
- e. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are the *only alternative* for the one in need; without this specific protection, they will be destroyed.
- f. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge provide protection *only within their boundaries*; to go outside meant death.
- g. With both Jesus and the cities of refuge, full freedom comes with the *death of the High Priest*.
- h. A *crucial distinction*: The cities of refuge only helped the *innocent*; the *guilty* can come to Jesus and find refuge.

C. Laws regarding murder.

- 1. (29-30) Two witnesses are required before the punishment for murder.

And these *things* shall be a statute of judgment to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings. Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses; but one witness is not sufficient testimony against a person for the death penalty.

a. **One witness is not sufficient testimony against a person for the death penalty:** One witness was never enough to condemn a murderer to death. Furthermore, the witnesses had to be so certain that one of them must be willing to initiate the actual execution - to "cast the first stone" (Deu 17:6-7).

i. This puts the words of Jesus regarding the woman taken in adultery in John 8 in perspective: *He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first* (Joh 8:7). Jesus asked for the official witness to step forward and go on record as having witnessed this act of adultery, yet show himself hypocritical enough to bring the woman, but not the man to judgment.

b. **One witness is not sufficient testimony:** We may comfort ourselves that we would never judge someone guilty of murder so quickly, without proper evidence; but how often do we murder someone's reputation in our own minds or in the minds of others with *no* witnesses, much less one.

i. God is concerned about the murder of reputation, as well as physical murder, and commands *Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses* (1Ti 5:19) - the same standard as for proving murder!

ii. Remember 1Ti 5:19 does not say "except from two or three gossips"; it says *except from two or three witnesses*. If a matter is false, it does not become

true because many people hear it or many people repeat it.

2. (31-32) *A murderer's life cannot be ransomed.*

Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. And you shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the priest.

- a. **You shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer:** If someone was guilty of murder, they could not make monetary restitution in the place of their life. The principle of Gen 9:6 stands: *Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.*
- b. **You shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge:** This reflects an important principle; namely, that money cannot replace justice. Sometimes a monetary reward satisfies justice (as in Exo 22:4, for example); but other times it does not and should not be used as a replacement for justice.

3. (33-34) *The urgency to bring murderers to justice.*

So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel.

- a. **For blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land:** Unjudged murders *defile* a nation. When murderers are not brought to justice, there is a blot on a nation that only the severe judgment of God can cleanse.

b. **Except by the blood of him who shed it:** The way to avoid this defilement is to judge and execute murderers - *no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.* (Gen 9:6)

i. One may say that because of the stain of so many unpunished murders, the United States of America is a defiled land. Across the country, many are murdered under many circumstances and few are brought to justice. The blood of the slain cries out before God.

Marriage of Female Heirs

Num 36:1 The heads of the families in the clan of Gilead, the son of Machir and grandson of Manasseh son of Joseph, went to Moses and the other leaders.

Num 36:2 They said, "The LORD commanded you to distribute the land to the people of Israel by drawing lots. He also commanded you to give the property of our relative Zelophehad to his daughters.

Num 36:3 But remember, if they marry men of another tribe, their property will then belong to that tribe, and the total allotted to us will be reduced.

Num 36:4 In the Year of Restoration, when all property that has been sold is restored to its original owners, the property of Zelophehad's daughters will be permanently added to the tribe into which they marry and will be lost to our tribe."

Num 36:5 So Moses gave the people of Israel the following command from the LORD. He said, "What the tribe of Manasseh says is right,

Num 36:6 and so the LORD says that the daughters of Zelophehad are free to marry anyone they wish but only within their own tribe.

Num 36:7 The property of every Israelite will remain attached to his tribe.

Num 36:8 Every woman who inherits property in an Israelite tribe must marry a man belonging to that tribe. In this way all Israelites will inherit the property of their ancestors,

Num 36:9 and the property will not pass from one tribe to another. Each tribe will continue to possess its own property."

Num 36:10 (10-11) So Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, did as the LORD had commanded Moses, and they married their cousins.

Num 36:12 They married within the clans of the tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph, and their property remained in their father's tribe.

Num 36:13 These are the rules and regulations that the LORD gave the Israelites through Moses in the plains of Moab across the Jordan River from Jericho.

Numbers 36:1-13

Numbers 36 - Laws Concerning Women Heirs

A. The problem of female and tribal inheritance.

1. (1-2) The background.

Now the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near and spoke before Moses and before the leaders, the chief fathers of the children of Israel. And they said: "The LORD commanded my lord Moses to give the land as an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel, and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters.

a. **The LORD commanded my lord Moses to give the land as an inheritance:** This passage is a reference back to Num 27:1-11, where the daughters of Zelophehad were concerned that their father's inheritance would vanish, because there were no sons in their family.

b. **Was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters:** God, through Moses, declared that if a father has no sons, the inheritance can then go to the daughters.

2. (3-4) *The problem raised by the solution regarding Zelophehad's daughters and their issue.*

"Now if they are married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and it will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so it will be taken from the lot of our inheritance. And when the Jubilee of the children of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so their inheritance will be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers."

a. **If they are married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken:** If the land was given to the daughters, then when the daughters married, the land went to their husband's tribe - and eventually, the original tribe's lands would become depleted.

b. **So their inheritance will be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers:** Solving the problem of Zelophehad's daughters had created another problem - how to keep the property in a tribe through the generations. This illustrates an important principle -

that there are rarely perfect solutions to problems; there are usually answers that are trade-offs in other areas. Maturity is able to make and accept the right decisions even when they aren't perfect, "cost-free" solutions.

B. God's answer to the issue of daughter's and tribal inheritance.

1. (5-9) How to keep the land within the tribes.

Then Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the LORD, saying: "What the tribe of the sons of Joseph speaks is right. This *is* what the LORD commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, 'Let them marry whom they think best, but they may marry only within the family of their father's tribe.' So the inheritance of the children of Israel shall not change hands from tribe to tribe, for every one of the children of Israel shall keep the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel shall be the wife of one of the family of her father's tribe, so that the children of Israel each may possess the inheritance of his fathers. Thus no inheritance shall change hands from one tribe to another, but every tribe of the children of Israel shall keep its own inheritance."

a. **But they may marry only within the family of their father's tribe:** The solution is fairly simple - if a daughter in a family receives an inheritance of land, she must marry within the tribe. Since the tribes were large enough, this really was no burden.

b. **Every tribe of the children of Israel shall keep its own inheritance:** Seemingly, if a daughter married outside the tribe, she had to forfeit the inheritance - because not only did she have inheritance rights, but the

tribe did also. Her individual right of inheritance was not the only nor the greatest consideration.

2. (10-12) *How the specific problem worked out in regard to the daughters of Zelophehad.*

Just as the LORD commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad; for Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married to the sons of their father's brothers. They were married into the families of the children of Manasseh the son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of their father's family.

a. **Their inheritance remained in the tribe of their father's family:** In their case, not only did they marry within the tribe, but they **were married to the sons of their father's brothers** - their cousins. This obviously kept the land inheritance within the tribe, and even within the larger family unit.

3. (13) *Conclusion to the book: By the Jordan.*

These are the commandments and the judgments which the LORD commanded the children of Israel by the hand of Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho.

a. **By the hand of Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan:** The Book of Numbers began **in the wilderness** (Num 1:1). It now finished as close to the Promised Land as you can get without actually being there.

b. **Across from Jericho:** As the Children of Israel stood across from the city of Jericho, we should consider what it took to take them from Egypt to this place **across the Jericho.**

i. From their encampment at Mount Sinai, God gave Israel the opportunity to grow from being a slave

people to be a Promised Land people. He taught them how to be ordered, organized, cleansed, separated, blessed, how to give, to be reminded of God's deliverance, given God's presence, and received the tools to advance to the Promised Land.

ii. Then, as the nation actually set out from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land, they found themselves struggling with the flesh - they murmured, complained, and rebelled; most of all, they failed to enter into what God had set before them by faith - and a generation of unbelief was condemned to perish in the wilderness.

iii. God led the nation for some 38 years in the wilderness, with much motion but no progress - enduring more rebellion and murmuring, but essentially waiting until the generation of unbelief had died and a generation willing to trust God for big things had come to maturity.

iv. So they set out towards the Promised Land again and faced the same challenges of the flesh - but dealt with them better this time, until they made their way to the threshold of the Promised Land.

v. By spiritual analogy, many Christians die in the wilderness because they will not trust God and will not enter into what He has set before them. Many Christians also see the evidence of that lack of faith display itself in a weakness towards the things of the flesh. Sadly, many Christians live more in the wilderness than on the threshold of the Promised Land.

vi. Finally, consider what it would take to move the Children of Israel from **across from Jericho** to the Promised Land. Staying on the shores of the Jordan River is better than being in the middle of the

wilderness; but it isn't the Promised Land yet. They came this far by faith and will need faith to take them the rest of the way.